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FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926

AMAZING

stories

founded by HUGO GERNSBACH

ALL New Stories

**plus • Darrell Schweitzer talks
with Wilson Tucker • The Interstellar
Connection/9 Book Reviews
• 6 Department Features**



**15 Original Illustrations • Fabian, Freeman
Kuykendall, Mavor, Raven, Vogler**

IN THIS ISSUE

Packed to brimming with all new stories, book and film reviews, fan news, fact articles, illustrations and a famous author interview, this issue of *Amazing* delivers the kind of package we have been carefully working toward over the last twelve months. But our efforts won't stop here. Hopefully, each successive issue will see us further along in our evolutionary process—we're now more than ready to fly.

After building each issue it's interesting to go over the names and addresses of all contributors and see just where we're all coming from—literally. We have two writers from England (London and Essex) plus writers and artists from the following states: Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Maryland, Washington, Oregon, New York, Missouri, Arizona, Michigan, Virginia, Colorado and California.

As our stories range in topic and tone, so do the illustrations in style and interpretation, lending added dimension and entertainment. Of special mention is our cover art, the work of illustrator David Mattingly, who at the age of 23 is into a career anyone could envy. Presently employed at Walt Disney Productions as a matte artist, he has worked on "The Cat from Outer Space", "The Return of the Apple Dumpling Gang" and "The Black Hole", a film that promises to rival the best of the latest science fiction blockbusters. Also a magazine, record album, and book cover illustrator, Mattingly appears destined for a long and rewarding life's work and we look forward to presenting more of his paintings on future covers.

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David Mattingly

AMAZING STORIES

May, 1980

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founded by Hugo Gernsback

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TECHNOLOGY: The end or the means

Technology is defined as the sum total of the technical means employed to meet the material needs of a society: or alternately, the application of science. It is hardly something we can do without, and yet, during the 60's it became a dirty word equated with a lot of dirty business. Many people, mostly young and rebellious, rightly questioned our society's values, identifying our technological orientation as the reason for a seemingly headlong plunge into empty materialism, and worse: they were convinced we were moving toward possible destruction of the planet Earth as we know it because of horrendous weapons capabilities developed by the industrial-military alliance in the name of defense.

All tied up with the senseless murders in Vietnam and the arms race of the cold war, technology became synonymous with a monster every bit as bug-eyed as the worst to emerge out of the science fiction of the 30's.

In addition to materialism and possible destruction, today we have pollution, food shortages, depletion of natural resources and an energy crisis. The aura of fear is growing among young and old as well as certain authorities, manifesting itself in a cautionary feeling that we should call a halt to technological development and return to the "good old days" (whatever they were). Experimental communes are on the wane, but the spirit of simplifying one's life and conserving things is slowly weaving itself into the fabric of our national consciousness. As we have recognized the ravages our greed for the "good things" has wrought upon our environment, we have come to grips with fears ranging from those concerned with mere loss of luxury to those involved with our very survival.

We are running scared. And while many of us continue to waste and over-consume, almost everyone knows in his heart that this particular joyride is coming to an end: this much we have learned.

The unfortunate aspect of pendulum-swing cycles in public thinking is the fact that so much wisdom is passed over as our minds sweep back to the other extreme. The stuff in the middle of the poles is the stuff with which we must fashion a new way of life for the 80's and after. What we are confronted with is not a bug-eyed monster after all, but rather a *super challenge* to be met with the responsible application of science—which today, especially, appears to be the most precise definition of the word, technology.

What many overlook is that if misapplication got us into a mess, the *only* way out is, not regression, but intelligent use of the special knowledge we have attained. If we can accomplish a change in public attitudes (with accompanying shifts in public funding) toward such a positive approach to our problems, the rewards may take shape in standards of living that could make today's so-called luxury look primitive, indeed. Quoting Carl Sagan: "We are at an epochal, transitional moment in the history of life on Earth. There is no other time as risky,

but no other time as promising for the future of life on our planet."

Hopefully that good old American know-how and inventiveness in the face of adversity is going to really take off in the 80's and do for us what needs to be done. One major addiction leading us all around by the nose is our hang-up over personal transportation: the automobile will bear the brunt of any additional fuel shortages, making it mandatory for its role and design to be altered accordingly. Although logistics of automobile production prohibit introduction of any new engine on a large scale at the present time, a shift to electric cars may become feasible and necessary economically if future supplies of petroleum become uncertain, scarce and very, very expensive.

The energy needs of the future will hinge upon creative, intelligent production of alternate sources, both for stop-gap fulfillment and long-term requirements. We will have to depend on the use of hydrocarbon fuels from heavy oil and sand tar, coal gasification and liquifaction plus nuclear reactors to meet present needs, and move toward full development of ground-based solar power, solar energy satellites and nuclear fusion for the future. The excessive fear generated by the anti-nukes is another aspect of the "stop technology" school, but it may actually serve to assure the highest standards possible in the responsible development of this energy source.

In the fields of health and medicine we should expect great strides to be made. Environmental hazards and astronomical medical costs have already produced a public much more aware of prevention as opposed to patching up after disease sets in; we can hardly afford to get sick anymore. People are following the latest books on how to keep healthy with good nutrition, exercise and healthy mental attitudes. Health care for those who do get sick or injured will become increasingly specialized with computers playing a key role in the scheme of events. Computers and mass communications technologies will be designed to handle diagnoses, testing and prescriptions for health-care centers and hospitals in the future. Bio-medical breakthroughs will include nuclear-powered hearts; synthetic skin; birth control vaccines; artificial wombs; synthetic blood (see Amazing Facts, in this issue); biochemical control of behavior, pain, memory and intelligence; man-computer combinations and much, much more. Progress with transplants, tissue regeneration, prosthetics and genetic engineering may solve the problem of aging within the next few generations, permitting lifespans of 100-plus or even more healthy, productive years for the average human being.

Such technological advances automatically create counterbalancing effects as surely as good opposes evil. For instance, what do we do with all those super-survivors and how will they fit into society? Or how will we insure that genetic engineering and test tube reproduction will be used responsibly? Plus there will arise a host of other socio-economic and political questions. And the answer in the never-ending spiral of life's solutions and challenges is, or course, to meet those challenges, too.

But it will be eminently worth it.

If we have the guts to embrace the future with such positive attitudes, the sky literally will be no limit at all. And the exploration, colonization and industrialization of space will be our next frontier—as inevitable a quest as was our continent for Columbus.

Communications satellites have already revolutionized world-wide communications. Development of the space shuttle will usher in a dramatic new era in satellite services, including technological streamlining of ground-generated

and transmitted power as well as actual generation of power in space for transmission to the ground via solar energy satellites. Political and economic factors will be major roadblocks for the world's full-blown expansion into space, but if these can be surmounted we may see colonization of the moon and exploration of the entire solar system by sophisticated unmanned space vehicles before the end of this century.

In another two or three centuries or so, our descendants may be exploring and colonizing the entire solar system. Perhaps by then they will have come into contact with other advanced civilizations in the galaxy. Then as the solar system becomes too limiting, the next great challenge will be interstellar travel, a challenge that could occupy mankind forever.

Technology is the tool through which man can solve his earth-bound problems and pave the way to the stars. It is the tool through which war may become obsolete. We could suppose that any ultra-advanced extraterrestrial society we may meet in the future must have successfully passed the high-risk stage of technological development with which we are now struggling. And we, too, may be able to evolve beyond the stupidity of possibly destroying ourselves with our own discoveries. —

AN OPEN LETTER TO JERRY POURNELLE

Dear Mr. Pournelle,

Forgive me for criticizing you. You were right and I was wrong. I take my hat off to you, but I'm not the least bit sorry.

Three years ago I wrote you a letter attacking an article you had written for your column "A Step Farther Out". The subject was radiation hazards from nuclear power plants, etc.

Your invigorating and sarcastic reply prompted me to investigate the subject thoroughly in the spirit of *I'll show him!* Formal reasoning doesn't take sides . . . all I managed to do was prove to myself that you were right.

The obvious next step was to show the local anti-nuclear activists the results of my investigation so that we could all go home satisfied and content that it wasn't really as dangerous or expensive as we'd feared. They wouldn't even look! When I confronted them with questions, I got evasions. When I confronted them with facts, these were either ignored or denied (not rebutted; denied!). When I confronted them with mathematics and propositional logic they responded with a fear that bordered on panic.

That fear fascinated me. A deep seated horror of rationality had to come from somewhere, and I had to delve into philosophy to find out where . . . but it didn't take long—who was John Galt?

Who stands to lose if the free democra-

cies of the western world . . .—equip themselves with the means to produce electricity, i.e., productivity, i.e., wealth?

Who stands to lose if these free nations build power plants . . .—that are relatively immune to miner's strikes, oil strikes, rail strikes, operator strikes and other forms of worker manipulation?

Who stands to lose if we build . . .—power plants so hardened that they have a good chance of continuing to supply electricity to radar tracking systems, missile silos and communications systems even after a nearby nuclear detonation?

—Plants which can continue to produce electricity for years even if blockaded or besieged?

—Power plants which enable us to improve our knowledge about, and supply of fissionable materials suitable for deployment in weapons systems?

—Plants which cannot easily be infiltrated by saboteurs or "liberated" by gangs of terrorists?

Who stands to gain if we back away from this opportunity?

Rationality is our tool for individual survival. To reject it is to embrace death, perhaps not immediately, but somewhere down the line the dues will be paid. In the meantime, we have altruism—the doctrine of human sacrifice embodied in the form of collectivism. Jane Fonda once said, "The church that I relate to most is called 'The People's Temple' . . . It provides a sense of what life should be about." Now you know

why and I know why.

No, I'm not sorry I hassled you, you ornery old grouch! I'm glad! Thank you for being a vile enough old reprobate to actually stand up and shout me down when you knew you were right! Nuff said . . . now stop gloating and get back to work.

Sincerely,
Hank Phillips
Austin, Texas



Kicks and Kudos

The following letter was written in answer to correspondence concerning Mr. Green's collection of Amazing dating from Vol. 1, No. 1, in which we asked if he would trade his copy of Vol. 1, No. 1 (lost to fire from our archives) for a lifetime subscription for himself and one heir.

My Dear Sir,

The above proposition tempts me so strongly I should say "Get thee behind me, Satan," but rather I shall say "Get thee in front of me, Bernhard, so I can shake thy hand." However, complications are part and parcel of life. My complication is that I am a packrat. Since I was able to walk and talk collecting was my mania. My house reflects my myriad interests ranging from pipes to plates, but one room is my special "own room." My youth is contained within its four filled walls crammed with the outpourings of my dearest, never met, friends.

The realm of fantasy and fact, of science and science fiction; more than just old books and magazines, these walls contain my glorious misspent youth and when I muse over an early volume of *Amazing Stories*, the past comes to life and I see the goggle-eyed "loner" who touched the hands of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, E. R. Burroughs—and through their gift and his imagination went to the moon, wafted him-

self to Mars and watched the flowering of the strange Orchid.

Unlike my ageless friends who opened cosmic doors for me—age has come to me, but my dreams remain young and touching a particular book or magazine evokes the past—my past—and to my dreams I cling.

However, if you want I could entrust you with the, say, first half year of *Amazing* for photo-copying and allow you to enjoy an old man's dream. Also if you wish to compensate me, due to the increasing spiral of inflation, I couldn't say anything less than God Bless!

Sincerely,
Nivie Green
Allentown, PA

Dear Sir,

Glad to see Tom Staicar again with "*Interstellar Connection*." He's really good, and fun to read. I like his personal humor and obvious love of his subject matter.

Such concise info is great to get. It simplifies things. Not only does he tell us just enough of what we want to know, but where we can get it. And gentle advice.

Thank you for him. Keep him coming. I wonder what his real name is. When I first saw Staicar I thought it was misspelled. But whoever he is, he sure has a way with reviews. If I ever get a book written, I'll let him know it. The man is a salesman.

Yours truly,
Ed Spooner
Provincetown, Mass.

Tom will continue to please you in future issues—under the byline which is, indeed, his very own name.

Dear Mr. Bernhard,

Thanks for breathing new life into an sf institution. I'm sure Mr. White did his best but it was apparent *Amazing* needed help.

I like the changes made, especially the use of the old logo.

I'd like to suggest that instead of starting a short story on the back cover (the only thing about the new *Amazing* I don't care for), why not reprint an early cover illus-

tration in color on the back, thereby enabling SF art collectors to add to their collection?

In closing I have two wishes for the future of *Amazing*. First, I hope Fabian does some more cover work and second, that *Amazing* returns to monthly publication.

Keith Bastianini
Library, PA

Dear Mr. Gohagen,

I've been a steady reader of *Amazing* (and *Fantastic*) for about fifteen years, and in that space of time I've seen quite a few changes, some for the better, some for the worse.

I'd like to see you eliminate (or at least keep to the minimum) the reprints. Also keep printing stories by new writers. Who knows, you might find a new Heinlein or Asimov. Keep the "Fans, Prose, & Cons," and "The Interstellar Connection" departments.

One final suggestion, how about increasing the frequency to bimonthly, or maybe even monthly?

Jack Collinson
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

When it's in the cards, we plan to publish more often.

Dear Mr. Gohagen,

I don't usually buy any STF-Prozines since I'm a devoted fanzine addict and myself a publisher of some fanzines. In short, I'm more interested in fanzines than prozines. But that does not stop me from buying *Amazing Stories*. Not because I think your stories are particularly good or the articles very interesting—but because you run a fan-column. This fact puts *Amazing Stories* on top of all the other prozines I know of. As far as I know there isn't one single English-language prozine except *Amazing* that has a fan-col.

I haven't read that many ish's of *Amazing*, but out of the few I've read I think that one of the real tops for the old fan-col, "The Clubhouse," was reached when AS published the famous story "The Enchanted Duplicator" by Walt Willis and Bob

Shaw.

I think that Steve Fahnstalk has done a good job with the col in the November ish. He gives a lot of valuable information to those poor people still unaware of fandom and recommends some different kinds of fanzines (usually you don't see much writing about any fanzines except in SFR and Locus outside the fan-world—and personally I can't regard them as being fanzines any more). Wish that Rosce'll be with him!!

As for fanzines: I would very much like to trade with all faneds reading *Amazing*—I do myself publish fanzines in English (for example *Fandhome* and *A Memeographed Dollar Bill*). Therefore, I ask the kind editor to publish the whole of my address.

Anders Bellis
Vanadisvagen 13
113 46 Stockholm
Stockholm, Sweden

We think it would be fun if you would try reading the rest of our mag, too. Why not give it a shot?



AMAZING FUTURES

Games to Stimulate You to Think About Tomorrow

Future Games can give you the experience of moving through time. You can explore the year 2000 or 1984 or 3077 through simulations which create situations that may occur in the future. Games can give players previews of what they ought to *feel* in two years or two decades. At least in some parts of life.

The two games which are described on this page can be played in a variety of ways with a variety of people. The diversity which participants bring to the games can enhance your enjoyment. These games can also be used in different ways. Both have been played in informal groups as much for pleasure as for anything else but they have also been designed into classroom learning activities. Games can teach people how to learn about the future and are sometimes very effective at doing so.

THE FUTURE HEADLINES GAME

This is a game you can get serious about. It has inspired one metropolitan newspaper, *The Greenville News* of South Carolina, to publish a series of front pages showing readers what they might expect to see in 1990. A version of the game was independently conceived by Bantam Books publishers last year and served as a basis

for a number of radio talk shows around the country as listeners phoned-in tomorrow's headlines. More adaptations of the game are possible, however, and it is not far-fetched to expect to see it become the central idea for a TV quiz contest, for instance, or for ad campaigns. Yet it can be played by a small circle of friends without elaborate props or preparation.

The objective of the Future Headlines Game is to generate headlines for stories that might appear in editions of the newspaper at some date, months or years from now. It is a game without "winners" or "losers" since it seeks to draw imaginative ideas out of people; it does not aim to "defeat" anybody. Ordinarily at least some of everyone's forecasts are used in the final product: a mock newspaper front page.

Equipment for the game is simple. A pad of newsprint does nicely, some tape and felt tip markers for every group playing is all that is needed. The tape is used to stick sheets of paper onto a smooth surface, like a window, so everyone can see the front page take shape. Another possibility is to tape the paper to a large piece of cardboard to give the "layout" person — whoever can draw straight lines — a stiff writing support under the paper. Mark the newsprint into columns and allow space for the "flag" (newspaper title) and banner headline. That's it. When this much is done, you're all set to play.

To start you should decide what date in the future your newspaper is simulating. Obviously the kind of events which can occur in 1999 will be dramatically different than those which could happen in 1980. Beyond this you are on your own. When each group finishes making up their page, they should explain their completed

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

by Tom Staicar



Shadow of Earth by Phyllis Eisenstein (Dell, \$2.25). This is only the second novel by Phyllis Eisenstein, whose high quality short fiction has been featured in the SF magazines for years. It is obvious that she did a lot of historical research in order to create a believable and detailed background for the book. The novel has to do with a dimension belt which allows Celia Ward to accompany her inventor friend Larry Meyers into an alternate version of the Earth of our own time. Existing simultaneously with our Earth, this one has Spanish spoken in Evanston, Illinois and a history which took a different turn in 1588, with the Spanish Armada defeating the English decisively.

Upon entering the other world, Larry and Celia become separated and captured, with Celia kidnapped for later sale at a slave auction. She finds the status of women to be abysmally low, with floor-scrubbing and constant danger of rape

suddenly the norm for her life. She is sold to another buyer, this time as a source of blonde babies, and this time she is made pregnant after being raped. Pregnancy in that primitive world, lacking any knowledge of basic sanitation or medicine, is very often the cause of death for women.

Fantasy readers and others who daydream about how nice it would be if "we" could escape our polluted, technologically-oriented world and return to an idyllic setting of centuries past where "we" could live our lives as noble lords and ladies, should read this book as a reminder that the vast majority of people have always been peasants, slaves or downtrodden workers with little freedom or hope. Individual freedom for women (or men) is a relatively recent and rare condition, in America's case based upon the effects of the Industrial Revolution and such factors as democracy and good fortune.

Watch for Phyllis Eisenstein's name; she is a writer of genuine talent.

Roadmarks by Roger Zelazny (Del Rey, \$8.95). Roger Zelazny has written so many fine novels through the years, such as *The*



Dream Master, that I started reading his new book with high hopes. Unfortunately, I found it to be disappointing and unsatisfying.

The basic premise, that Red Dorakeen is a traveler on the Road ("It traverses Time—Time past, Time to come, Time that could have been and Time that might yet be."), seems contrived. Unused or little used branches in the Road can fade away, while new branches can come into being when important actions take place. This creates an impression that all actions are inconsequential in the novel, since practically anything might be tossed in or taken out at will. When we are informed that someone mysterious has taken out a contract on poor Red's life, we know we will have to sit through an obligatory ten separate attempts on Red's life as he drives down the Road. This book makes Zelazny look like an underachiever, largely because we know how good he can be. Perhaps he is now in the unenviable position of the top name writer who dares not slip a little with any single work.

Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials by Wayne Douglas Barlowe and Ian Summers (Workman Pub. Co., \$15.95; trade paperback \$7.95; also SF Book Club). I don't know how Ian Summers does it. First, he discovers the Brothers Hildebrandt and signs them up to illustrate Tolkien books, then he produces such fine collections as *Tomorrow and Beyond*, and then we find that he has found an 18-year old artist who has a gift for drawing aliens like no one else so far. His latest discovery, Wayne Douglas Barlowe, now age 21, is the son of Sy and Dorothea Barlowe, well known natural history illustrators. The younger Barlowe's works show us detailed representations of beings who have never been seen by anyone, and this makes his collection of paintings all the more remarkable.

Basing his work upon the ecology, planetary environments and textual details found in the fiction of leading SF authors, Barlowe has brought to life in vivid color the aliens we have read about. The book includes illustrations of the



aliens of Larry Niven, James Tiptree, Jr., Jack Vance, Fred Pohl, A.E. van Vogt and many others.

I urge you to buy this book right away. It is destined to become a standard companion to SF literature.

Toward Distant Suns, A Bold, New Prospectus for Human Living in Space by T. A. Heppenheimer, Foreword by Gerard K. O'Neill (Stackpole Books, \$16.95). Heppenheimer was one of the early advocates of space colonization and utilization and has become a leader in the movement which includes Gerard K. O'Neill and the L-5 Society. *Toward Distant Suns* is a visionary book, profusely illustrated with breathtaking conceptions of future uses of space. If you are a fan of Chesley Bonestell, Don Dixon and other artists who do intricately detailed paintings of astronomical and space exploration subjects, you might decide to buy this volume for the illustrations alone.

The text is written at a level suitable for the average person rather than the technically trained expert, and no mathematical expertise is required to fully grasp the con-

A bold, new prospectus for human living in space

T. A. HEPPENHEIMER

author of *COLONIES IN SPACE*

Foreword by Gerard K. O'Neill

cepts. The fact that humans may shortly live in space and work on projects in permanent colonies is an exciting one and *Toward Distant Suns* expands outward beyond the basic information given in earlier space colony books.

Heppenheimer speculates about future developments such as separate nation status for the colonies and long-term voyages out of the Solar System. Mankind may evolve differently in space, with unique influences on the process of natural selection, and this might lead to a new type of human.

If people like Senator Proxmire can be persuaded to let it happen, our energy crisis might be alleviated by orbiting solar energy receptors beaming microwaves to Earth stations at low cost. Minerals and other resources await us in the Asteroid Belts and on the Moon. Books like *Toward Distant Suns* arm us with facts and remind us that the exploration of space is an exciting endeavor which must not be allowed to fade into history now that the Moon landings are over and money is tight.

Science Fiction Voices #1, by Darrell Schweitzer; **Science Fiction Voices #2**, by Jeffrey M. Elliot (both Borgo Press, Box 2845, San Bernardino, CA 92406, \$2.95 each plus \$1.00 handling); **Speaking of Science Fiction** by Paul Walker (Luna

Publications, 655 Orchard Street, Oradell, NJ 07649, \$18.75 hardbound, \$6.95 paperback). These three books are collections of question-and-answer format interviews. Interviewing is more difficult than it looks, requiring a thorough background in the author's works, a knowledge of other works about him or her and a list of questions which will elicit the best responses. To proceed otherwise could lead to embarrassment, wasted time and lost opportunities. It is interesting that all three interviewers conducted the sessions with the authors in different ways; Schweitzer finding a quiet room during a hectic SF convention in most cases, Elliot often driving to the homes of the authors and Walker using the mails to contact and question his interview subjects. All three men are good at what they do, and factors such as which book features the most names you like best may be the reason you will buy one rather than another collection.

Walker's book was compiled from nearly a decade of interviews for his fanzine *Luna* (no longer published) and some are rather dated. His book contains 425 pages (as opposed to 63 and 62 pages for the

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Science Fiction Voices #1

Interviews with Science Fiction Writers Conducted by Darrell Schweitzer

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ALFRED BESTER
FREDERIK POHL
JAMES GUNN
FRITZ LEIBER
HAL CLEMENT
L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

A Borgo Press Book

Schweitzer and Elliot books, respectively). The Walker book contains some poorly drawn portraits which are best forgotten. The two Science Fiction Voices books feature recent, in-depth interviews, some of which appeared in magazines such as *Galileo*, *Future* and *Amazing*. *Voices #1* includes: Sturgeon, Bester, Pohl, Gunn, Leiber, Clement and de Camp. *Voices #2* has: Bradbury, Niven, van Vogt, Anderson and Silverberg. Walker's book has interviews with such writers as Laumer, Zelazny, Lafferty, Blish, Ellison, Brackett, Le Guin and several others.

Black Holes, The Edge of Space, The End of Time by Walter Sullivan (Anchor Press/Doubleday, \$17.95). Sullivan is Science Editor of the New York Times, has written several popular books, two of which were nominated for the National Book Award, and he accompanied Admiral Byrd and Sir Edmund Hillary on six Antarctic expeditions.

His task in *Black Holes* was to write an interesting and lucid book for the general reader without using technical jargon or scientific esoterica. The content also had to be free of popular nonsense such as ancient astronauts, or else his credibility would be diminished.

Writers of previous books about black holes include Isaac Asimov, John G. Taylor, Frederic Golden, Adrian Berry and Ben Bova. The fact that I had read all five of those books and still found Sullivan's interesting and rewarding, shows that he was successful. His book includes new research data gathered between 1975 and 1979, material not available to the previous authors.

Radio astronomy, space probes and the development and testing of Einstein's theories are covered in *Black Holes* in a journalistic style, each section beginning with a human interest story which leads into the background information. The speculations of Dr. Stephen Hawking, Dr. Richard P. Feynman and others make up the most fascinating sections of the book. Their theoretical work about the origin and ultimate destiny of the universe, as well as what may lie "outside" the universe, is advancing our understanding of the cosmos. Here is an example from the

BLACK HOLES

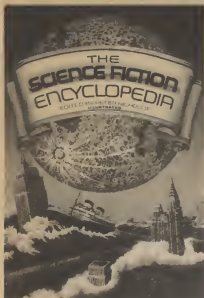
The Edge of Space,
The End of Time

WALTER SULLIVAN

book which shows the kinds of thinking being discussed in *Black Holes*: "What looks like a poistron falling into the hole can therefore be viewed as an electron tunneling out of the hole backward in time. Its interaction with the hole's gravity then reverses its time direction and converts it into an electron free to fly off into the universe."

A region where time does not exist and the possibility of a place where our universe joins another universe through the center of a black hole are two of the ideas in this fascinating book. It is interesting to note that these are serious scientists, rather than science fiction writers, who are thinking about these possibilities and gathering data to support their theories.

The Science Fiction Encyclopedia, edited by Peter Nicholls (Doubleday, \$24.95; Doubleday Dolphin paperback, \$12.95). For once, you'll get your full money's worth. This book is massive in every way—1,817 main entries, 175 special theme entries, hundreds of illustrations and a grand total of 700,000 words. Its 672 pages are filled with authoritative information resulting from a research project of



grand scope. Nicholls decided to allow personal biases and opinions into the text, and it is possible that a few errors and omissions will be found by diligent critics who will examine the finished work at leisure. However, Jack Williamson, Isaac Asimov and Frank Herbert are among the writers who examined advance copies of the encyclopedia and found the work to be accurate and scholarly.

From now on, when you try to recall an old TV series or film, or a novel or story series which you dimly remember, you can simply flip through the pages of Nicholls' reference book and find the answer you seek. Particularly useful is the checklist of themes. This feature allows you to find which authors and works have explored themes such as time paradoxes, parallel worlds or cyborgs.

The Science Fiction Encyclopedia is not meant to replace Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder*, James Gunn's *Alternate Worlds* or a number of bibliographic works and indexes. It is an essential reference book, however, for all libraries, scholars, teachers, fans and SF readers. Worth every penny. ●

AMAZING INTERVIEW

An Interview With Wilson Tucker

by Darrell Schweitzer

Wilson Tucker

Born November 23, 1914. Also known as Bob Tucker, author of detective stories, he wrote in the 1930s for amateur science fiction fan magazines, using pseudonym of "Hoy Ping Pong". Founder of Society for the Prevention of Wire Staples in Scienti-fiction Magazines. His own fan publications included *D'Journal*, *Le Zombie*, *The Neo-Fan's Guide* and an annual, *Fanzine Yearbook*. His first book was a detective novel, *The Chinese Doll*. Began selling short stories to science fiction magazines in 1941. Some of his better-known science fiction novels are: *City in the Sea* (1951), *Long, Loud Silence* (1952), *Time Bomb* (1955), *The Time Masters* (1953), *The Lincoln Hunters* (1957), and *Science Fiction Sub-Treasury* (1954), a collection of science fiction short stories.

Most critics have rated his work highly. His habit of using characters named after science fiction fan personalities attracted some attention. Some readers have expressed enjoyment of his humor.

He was married in 1953, and now lives near Bloomington, Ill. His chief occupation seems to be movie projectionist.

Amazing: This may begin with some pretense of seriousness, but I trust you'll be able to fix that.

Tucker: Okay.

Amazing: What attracted you to science fiction originally, and when?

Tucker: Sometime in 1930—I don't remember the date—I was an apprentice stagehand in a theater, and part of my job was to clean up the dressing rooms after the actors left. At some date unknown to me now, in 1930, some actor left behind a copy of *Weird Tales*, which I glommed onto. This was my first introduction to that crazy Buck Rogery stuff. After reading that I went to the newsstands and found other things. I think my first purchased magazine was Gernsback's *Wonder Stories*. Maybe late 1930, possibly 1931. Well, one thing led to another and I went from *Wonder* to *Astounding* to *Amazing* and all that. But it was really in the theater, because an actor had left behind a copy of *Weird Tales*—that was how I got into it.

Amazing: How did you find fandom after that?

Tucker: The letter column in *Astounding Stories*. I had read the letters in *Amazing* and *Wonder*, but in *Astounding* the letters from other fans seemed more lively, more interesting, and by and by I was also writing letters in to the editor. He never printed them, but I was listed in the *We Also Heard From* column. One issue they printed, "We have also heard from Bob Tucker." That was my introduction into fandom, and there was a fellow who did have a letter printed named Ted Lutwin somewhere in Jersey City, and he invited correspondence—penpals—and I wrote to him, and he wrote back, which was the beginning of a correspondence friendship that lasted about 20 years. One thing led to another. He told me about fanzines. He told me about all the good times they had in New York City when they went to meet one another, which eventually, years later, led to conventions. I fell into fandom because of Ted Lutwin.

Amazing: Now, about your other activities of this period, the true story of the Great Staple War please.

Tucker: Aha! I was casting about. I was just as foolish and as loudmouthed then as I am now, and I didn't believe in being ser-

ious. I took everything in a funny manner, tongue-in-cheek, if you will, and it struck me that in the 1930's, when we were in the middle of a depression, you will remember, and everything was hard to come by—prices were low; salaries were low—what a tremendous amount of money could be saved if somehow magazines were bound without staples. We could save metal. And I also saw a chance to have a good time, to make a big joke of it. Suppose magazines came out bound with chewing gum, or glue, or lifesavers. Anything sticky in place of staples, and we could save all the metal for staples. So I launched a crusade for magazines to be published without staples. That led to my club, and I no longer remember the name of it. It was something like The Society For The Prevention of Wire Staples In Science Fiction Magazines. Wollheim, who also appreciates a good joke when he sees it, immediately joined the battle with the opposition, the Society To Save Wire Staples, etc. We carried on this phony war in the letter-columns of the magazines, and in fanzines, and I took the position I wanted the wire staples yanked out; he took the position he wanted them saved. And it went on for two or three years before it died of its own weight.

Amazing: Where did Hoy Ping Pong get involved?

Tucker: Ah. Hoy Ping Pong, born in 1934. I wrote—forgive me for boasting—the first convention report ever in fandom. And the convention never happened. It was an imaginary report of an imaginary convention that took place on a spaceship, ever so many years into the future, and we fans chartered a spaceship and took off into space for our week-long convention. So I did a convention report, quite a bit like the convention reports of today. The details never change. And casting about for a pen-name to put on this—frankly I don't know why I didn't put Bob Tucker as the byline on this. Are you familiar with ping pong, the juices, and ping pong the game?

Amazing: The game.

Tucker: I picked it up from the ping pong ball game and put Hoy in front of it. It was just one of those idiotic things that pop into your mind—Oh good! I'll be a Chinaman; call myself Hoy Ping Pong. The thing was

published in a 1934 *Wonder Stories*, and that's where he began.

Amazing: How did you move from fandom to writing professionally?

Tucker: I started in the usual way. I think every fan in the world wants to sell stories to editors. I bought my first typewriter in 1931 for the single purpose of writing great, thrilling science fiction stories and selling. I bought the typewriter and immediately proceeded to start writing stories, and I wrote science fiction stories for ten years and couldn't sell a one of them. Oh, they were terrible. They were rotten. Everybody rejected my stories. But finally, ten years after I purchased the typewriter, in 1941, Fred Pohl bought my first story. In ten years' time I had progressed to the point where I could write a coherent story that Fred Pohl, shall we say holding his nose, was able to buy. And from that point on I did several short stories in the 40's, but I wasn't satisfied, and I discovered books, that is, writing books. I know now what I didn't know then. My real field is books. I do far better books than I do short stories. My short stories are horrendous. They're terrible, but the books are decent. Some good, some bad, but they're decent. I found that I liked better to work in the book length, and I wrote a mystery story in 1945 and sold it in '46. It went in the slush pile; I had no agent; and the editor picked it from the slush pile, liked it, asked for revisions, and bought it. I thought, Good Lord! You see, when I write short stories, maybe they're rejected fifteen or twenty times, but the very first book I wrote was bought, and I realized this was my field, and I've stayed in the book field ever since. I've done a few short stories. Not many, but mostly books, because I like them better, they sell easier, and they bring me far more money than short stories do.

Amazing: Do you keep your fanzine work separate from your professional stuff, or do they ever mix.

Tucker: Separate entirely. I didn't realize it at the time, but it worked out this way. As Wilson Tucker I'm a pro, as Bob Tucker I'm a fan. I didn't mean it that way, but that's just the way convention programs seem to separate me. I started publishing fanzines very early. My first fanzine was in

1932. It was lousy. I'm glad you can't find a copy today, because you'd hold your nose if you had to read it. I think the second one was born in 1935. In 1938 I started out with my most successful one. One called *Le Zombie*, if you've ever seen it, and I hit upon a good balance. It was humorous. It was cornball humor, all kinds of humor, slapstick, some subtle, some moronic, but mostly cornball humor, and it's still going today. My 40th anniversary issue is due this year. I do fanzines for fun, pure fun. It's keen. I'll never make a dime out of it and I don't give a damn. I enjoy writing fanzines.

Amazing: What are your writing methods like for your professional work?

Tucker: I begin with notes. First of all, I get an idea from somewhere. You know that silly old question, 'where do you get your ideas?' They're all around you. A thousand ideas a day crowd in on you. I pick up an idea from somewhere, think about it for a while, realize it could be built into a story, and then begin the research. Before I ever type the first page I go through several weeks or a month or two of research. I go to the library, or if necessary, buybooks, if the library doesn't have what I want. Usually, I rely on college texts. I'm not a hard science man. I've had no hard science training at all, so I have to rely on books to pick up my background. Then when I have got the research done, I usually start making notes on long, yellow legal pads, sometimes handwritten notes, sometimes typewritten notes, and a few weeks or a month after the idea has hit and the research has been done, I actually start typing. I'll do the first draft. When I reach the end of the book on the first draft—by writing a page you think of two more pages in your mind; by writing a chapter you think of two more chapters—I can go back and do a final one. I never have to do a third. By the time I do the second draft the story has gelled in my mind, and I can put it down on paper the way I want it. Then, of course, you go through looking for typos and edit out. Sometimes the ideas are well enough conceived that the first draft stands as is, but most often I go back and do a second. So from idea, to research, to pencil notes, to final draft—I'm a slow typist; I'm a two-finger typist—the average book takes seven or eight months to write because I

am so slow thinking it out. Other people can do one in thirty days. I cannot. In his hot days in the 1950's and 60's, Silverberg would do a complete novel in one month. I can't possibly do it. I can't type that fast, which is why it takes me eight months.

Amazing: Is the speed of the composition completely controlled by how fast you can type?

Tucker: Yes. It holds me down, because I am only a two-finger typist. I think faster than I write, of course, and I have to in a sense put thoughts on hold until my fingers can catch up. When I begin a sentence, I know the entire paragraph in my mind, which is to say the next six or seven sentences of the paragraph must be put on hold until I get there, because I am so damned slow in my typing.

Amazing: You mentioned once that *The Lincoln Hunters* is your favorite of your works. Why is this?

Tucker: I think because, first the hero was modelled on me. I used my own description, physical description. I used my own mental and emotional descriptions in the book. I'm the kind of a man who likes small towns and farms, the outdoors, as opposed to closed-in cities, and in the book, the hero journeys from a Cleveland of the future—a closed in city of two thousand and something, and he journeys back to Illinois of about 1868, I think the time was, and for the first time he discovers what wide open spaces really are. He discovers prairie. He sees stars for the first time, and he falls in love with this great, wonderful outdoors, which is me. I love the outdoors. I would prefer to spend my time out on a meadow anywhere on the prairie looking at the sky rather than in the city watching a ballet or a movie, or whatever. Because the book was modelled on me physically, and me, the way I feel, it became my best-loved book. That's why it's my favorite.

Amazing: Why are there so many variant versions of your books?

Tucker: (laughs) Because of damn fool stunts on my part, and damn fool stunts on editors' and printers' parts. *The Long Loud Silence* originally had an ending of cannibalism. The hero bound and killed and ate the heroine at the end, but the editor would not allow it. She was a lady, a sweet little old lady in tennis shoes, and to

her it was revolting. She said, "I like the book, but no, I will not accept the ending. You must change it." So I eliminated that and wrote a happy ending. The hero and the heroine got together and lived happily ever after. Gaaaak! But I wanted a sale, so I had to change it. In *The Time Masters*, the printer, who works for the Science Fiction Book Club, lost the last page of the manuscript and no one caught it, not the editor, not the copy reader, not me. The book went to press and exists today—you can find any number of copies in hard-cover—without the ending of the story, simply because the printer lost it. The paperback edition is complete. The hard-cover is not. In *Ice and Iron*, Doubleday printed the ending that I wanted and wrote. Judy-Lynn del Rey at Ballentine did not like the ending. She asked for a new chapter to give it a different ending, and because I wanted the sale, I gave her a new chapter.

Amazing: Is it always the right thing to do to make such changes on demand?

Tucker: Yes. I'm not one of these authors like some writers we could name but won't—no point in embarrassing them—who scream, "No! No! These are my precious words. You shall not touch a comma." I think that's . . . bull. If the editor, who knows his or her business far better than I do, wants the changes, I make the changes. I'll do it rather than lose the sale. Editor X, shall we say, says, "Okay Tucker, I like the story; I'll offer five thousand bucks; but I don't like that page or that chapter. You change it." You're damn right. For five thousand bucks I'll give her the ending she wants.

Amazing: Do you ever want to go back and restore the original ending, as in *The Long Loud Silence*, when the opportunity arises?

Tucker: Yes, I'd like to, and I have only once had the chance. About a year ago a publishing firm in Italy wrote to me and said that they'd heard a rumor that there had been an original ending which had been suppressed. Could I supply it? I said, "Sure," and I sent them the original ending, the cannibalism ending. Now I haven't seen the book yet. If they published it, I haven't got my copies yet, but as far as I know, only the Italian edition has my ori-

ginal ending.

Amazing: Since you are so noted for humorous presentations of everything, why are your books so frequently grim?

Tucker: Because humor in print does not sell as well as serious doom stuff. I know it may surprise you, but it's true. I once wrote a humorous novel based on a science fiction convention, and nobody would touch it. "Ah this is funny stuff. They don't want that. Give us a real story." And by 'real story,' they mean action. Bang-bang. Sweep the girl off her feet. Rape her if necessary. Kill the villain. That's what they want. They want grim stuff, serious stuff, whereas at conventions I can be and do what I want to do. Funny stuff. I have never been able to sell humor, with small exceptions.

Amazing: But several editors today specifically don't want grim fiction. They want upbeat, positive stuff.

Tucker: Well, I don't know the answer. I don't write many short stories. I've only sold three of them in the past eight years. I sold one to Terry Carr in 1970. I sold one to Ben Bova in 1976, and I sold one to Harlan Ellison in 1978. All three are tongue-in-cheek. But it isn't outright humor. It appears to be serious on the surface, murder and all that jazz; if you look between the lines it's tongue-in-cheek, and how I ever managed to sell a humorous, sexy murder story to *Analog* I'll never know. John Campbell must be turning in his grave.

Amazing: Would you like to do a humorous novel?

Tucker: Yes, indeed. I want to rewrite and sell the novel that I wrote about fans at a convention. But a dozen editors have seen it and nobody will buy. I wrote a convention fan novel that carries on like I carried on here at the podium this afternoon. Nobody'll buy it.

Amazing: Was it science fiction?

Tucker: Yes, it was about a science fiction convention, with a science fictional background, and it was a people story, what the people did at the convention. They decided to go into politics and take over the United States, a dictatorial takeover. Which is sort of science fictional.

Amazing: I would think the problem with such a work today is that too many such novels have been published, including two

by Buck Coulson and Gene DeWeese. Mack Reynolds did one—

Tucker: Yes, Dickson did one. It's dead today, but this was written twenty years ago and wouldn't sell twenty years ago. I was ahead of my time. It's worthless now because too many people have done it. Buck Coulson did two very successful books on the convention thing. But I did it first and it didn't sell. If I had waited twenty years and done it now, possibly it would have.

Amazing: Mack Reynolds did one in the early 1950's, *The Case of The Little Green Men*. He published it as a mystery. Suppose you rewrote yours as a mystery?

Tucker: Yes. It's possible. Tony Boucher did it first in *Rocket To The Morgue*. Mack followed him up with *Little Green Men*, and Malzberg did *In The Hall of The Planets*. But mine was written before all these came out. Because it couldn't sell, it's passe' today. I just lost out entirely.

NOTE: This interview was recorded at the 1978 Disclave in Washington, D.C. Wilson Tucker, pro, was listed as guest of honor, but Bob Tucker, fan humorist, caused the guest of honor speech to be a bizarre Happening, complete with parades and a battle going on behind the speaker's podium. Tucker is one of those few professionals—Robert Bloch and Bob Shaw are others—whose fan activity has only slightly diminished after years of professional involvement, and who actually enjoys two separate reputations, one as author of books like *The Long Loud Silence*, the other for such antics as the Disclave speech, and, stretching back over forty years, the Great Staple War.



Fans, Prose & Cons

Send Fanzines and news to Steve c/o this column, NW 440 Windus St., Pullman, WA 99163.

by Steve Fahnstalk

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Why does anyone want to be a fan? Why read fanzines, why produce fanzines, and why go to cons? Why, indeed? Why would any normal sf reader want to associate with other sf readers? (That question sort of answered itself, didn't it?)

It has been my experience that many sf readers desperately want contact with other sf readers; that they want to share the sf experience—and all too often, their contacts with sf are limited to reading books from the library or the corner store, watching the (always bland) sf on television or in the movies, or waiting eagerly for the new *Amazing* (or brand "X") to come out on the newsstands. If said reader is really lucky, perhaps he or she has one or two friends with whom to discuss sf, and they do so at every opportunity.

(I'm assuming, naturally, that the person who's reading this has little or no contact with fandom; if you're already actively involved, please bear with me.) If you're one of the people I'm talking about, I'm willing to bet that you are doing/are thinking about one of the following things: you want to write sf, or you want to criticize sf, or you want to draw sf-type pictures, or you just want to talk about your favorite sf with someone who understands what in the heck you're talking about. Am I right?

Okay. What I'm saying is that there is a place you can go. There is a (admittedly, non-professional) market for your talents-

and if you have no talent, but want to get involved in sf somehow, even if it's just airing a beef, fandom is for you.

Every fanzine I mention in these columns is looking for YOU. Every one of them wants your stories, or articles, or poetry, or art—or just your letters commenting on anything science-fictional! And who knows, you just might break into the professional ranks; some of our most famous names came from the ranks of the fans . . . people like Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, Fred Pohl, and many more. Who knows, you (or even I) might be the next Ellison . . . or Asimov, if your tastes run more in that direction.

Even if you have no ambitions to be a famed author or artist, you can get all the interaction you ever wanted or needed from fandom. It doesn't matter if you're young, or old, white, black or green, American, Swedish, beautiful, or ugly. Nobody cares who or what you are, you are invited to join our "family"—Ursula LeGuin said, at the thirty-third World Convention in Melbourne, Australia, that we are truly one family, and it's true!

So come on in, cousin. Send for a zine, or attend a con . . . it could well be the best thing you ever did for yourself. Enough preaching for one issue, okay?

My loyal, true-blue editor, Omar ("The Tentmaker") Gohagen, has kindly consented to let me do some small-press reviews. So from now on, I'm going to do a few things in addition to my fanzine reviews; but the s-p productions will only be an addition, and will never crowd out the zines, I promise. So. Many of you may not be aware that there is an enormous amount of sf stuff being put out by non-professional presses . . . stuff like books, tapes, posters, records, and more—and this is material you'll never see at the library or your local newsstand. And some is better quality than you'll ever see from DAW, or Doubleday, or Ballantine/Del Rey.

I'm going to start telling you, each issue, about a couple of the best . . . and I advise you to get some of it, for your collection, or just for your sf-loving soul!

Again, I repeat: for zine or con listings, or for feedback, write to me at NW 440 Windus St., Pullman, WA 99163. I'll try to answer every letter (if you enclose a Stamped, Self-Addressed Envelope) be-

cause I want you to know that I care. And for you overseas readers, here's a little added incentive: for the first letter I get from overseas that has enough International Reply Coupons to cover postage, I will send a hardcover, first-edition sf book. I'll return the rest of your IRC's. How's that for a deal? On to the listings.

FANZINES AND SMALL-PRESS OFFERINGS:

VECTOR; the journal of the British Science Fiction Association; \$2 ea., \$10 annually (includes membership in BSFA) to (US Agent) Cy Chauvin, 610 Gladstone, Detroit, MI 48202. *Vector* has been in existence for a long time, and is always a good read. Although I'm still waiting for the current issue (hint), I can, from past experience, recommend *Vector* without reservation.

FANTASY NEWSLETTER; \$5/year from Paul Allen, 1015 W. 36th St., Loveland, CO 80537. A "best buy"—this *Locus*-style newszine will interest any fantasy reader (and most sf readers). It's lucidly written, has news, reviews, and listings of both professional and fan productions, and is profusely illustrated with photos of book covers. If you don't believe me, try a sample issue for 50¢. Best of all, it's published monthly.

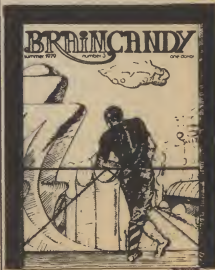
KRATOPHANY; \$1, irregular; from Eli Cohen, 2236 Allison Rd., Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1T6, Canada. This zine is, as the colophon says, a zine of "whimsy, linguistics, and bad puns." It's about thirty pages of mimeographed fun. Articles can be on any subject that strikes the editor's fancy, art is by such fanartists as Freff, Canfield, Shull, Gomoll, Kvern, and others. I like it ver' much.

BRAIN CANDY; \$1.25 from Jason Keehn, Apt. 1B, 38 Hannum Drive, Ardmore, PA 19003. The first thing I noticed about this slim zine was that editor Jason Keehn must be an alias of *Heavy Metal* artist "Möebius". From the front cover to the bacover (another fannish term), this guy's art is good. The contents are interesting, too: a UFO-takeoff editorial, a sercon (serious-constructive) article on J.G. Ballard by Darrell Schweitzer, a *Heavy Metal* commentary, and some nice art by Keehn,

Wade Gilbreath, and others. Short, but very sweet.

NIGHTWINDS; the Voice of the Guild; \$1.50 or 4/\$5, quarterly; from 50 Scottsdale Dr., Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The premiere issue from the Guelph Guild contains stories (some good), poetry (ditto), some excellent art from Doug Donald and Derek Grime; plus reviews and an extremely detailed bibliography (in a critical article) of Keith Laumer. A nice first effort.

FANDHOME 1/WEEKS ADFEN—TURES/ADVENTURES OF RAYMOND X. BRELLIGAN; from Anders Bellis, Vanadisvagen 13, 113 46 Stockholm, Sweden; weekly—price (US) unknown, but try a couple of bucks in IRC's. Whew! Not one, but three strange and funny little zines from Sverige—and I'm impressed! Bellis and his cohorts, Engholm and Nesle, have done some hilarious English-language zines in honor of 4SJ Ackerman's visit to "Sverifandom"—and if you think that's easy, try writing a zine in Swedish! They're jam-packed with fannish puns and humor: a quick sample from "Adventures of Raymond, etc."—"How-ever he gnuggade sin kacka rokokorumpa i morgongroten. (This sentence is really untranslatable, and therefore we are unable to provide the non-Swedish reader [with] the explanation [that] Brelligan entered the Walley of death without the slightest change of personality or underwear." Ha!



THE INSOMNIAC; from Zaharakis, 4729 Scotts Valley Dr., Scotts Valley, CA 95066. Price and frequency unknown. There is a priest (a Bishop!) named Mike Z. who has decided to get back into fandom, and I think we need him. He writes strange articles, and he's an exorcist. Really! He's funny, he's a good writer, and he seems to be good folks. Try sending him a 50¢ stamp, maybe he'll send you an ish.

THE MONTHLY MONTHLY; 75¢, \$9/year (monthly) monthly from Robert Runte; 10957-88 Ave., Edmonton, Alberta T6G 0Y9, Canada. The Gang of Four lives—and they're publishing a genzine (general-interest zine); this one is fanzine and mostly humorous, though partly serious. Some articles deal with fandom itself as practiced in Edmonton, some are on items of interest. (Heh.) Art by Vereschagin, Canfield, Durno, and Gibson. Interesting and fun.

SF CONVENTION REGISTER; 25¢ and SASE (up to 12 issues maximum), monthly, from Erwin S. "Filthy Pierre" Strauss, 9850 Fairfax Square #232, Fairfax VA 22031. Perhaps the most comprehensive con listing available anywhere. He even outdoes me! (Grr, gnash.)

AN HOUR WITH HARLAN ELLISON; \$4.98 plus 50¢ p&h from Hourglass Productions, PO Box 1291, Garden Grove, CA 92643. If you've ever wanted to hear what your favorite authors sound like, you simply must get one of these tapes (also available are Asimov, Bradley, Garrett, Gerrold, Goldin, Kurtz, Leiber, Niven, Sky, and Karen Willson's SF music [the latter is \$5.98]) and give it a listen. They're fantastic (plug); and the Ellison tape sounds like he's talking to you! Another nice touch is that Hourglass gives the authors 10% of the price. Get 'em!

SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE; \$1, 12/\$8 from Andrew Porter/*Starship*; PO Box 4175, New York, NY 10017. This is very similar to *Locus*; coverage is a little talkier, and there are not as many people photos, but I think it might be a worthwhile supplement to keep you up-to-date on who's who and what's in sf. Tell Andy I sent you.

The Fifth Book of Virgil Finlay



THE FIFTH BOOK OF VIRGIL FINLAY; \$15.75 from Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood Lane, Saddle River, NJ 07458. This book is well worth the steep cover price; Gerry's house is one of the best small publishing houses, and he offers art books in limited editions that nobody who has any interest at all in sf art can afford to miss. Here, in one volume, is Finlay's work in *Weird Tales* from 1939-1954! Goshwow!

PRINCIPIA DISCORDIA, or How I Found Goddess and What I Did To Her When I Found Her; \$4 from Loompanics Unltd., PO Box 264, Mason, MI 48854. Mike Hoy has done it again! He somehow dug up this book, which is a precursor to the whole "Illuminatus" brouhaha. And what a "haha" it is—this is the first "above-ground" edition of this famous work, and if you've got a funnybone, this'll tickle it pink!

CON LISTINGS:

RAIN TOO; Feb. 15-17; \$7 to Box 48478, Bental Station, Vancouver, B.C. V7X 1A2, Canada. Relaxicon, the best kind. Guest: John Varley.

PENULTICON III; Feb. 22-24; \$15 to 4430 W. 36th Ave., Denver, CO 80212. GOH's: Vonda McIntyre, Hal Clement. TM: Ed Bryant. The usual events.

HALCON 3; Mar. 7-8; \$12 supporting, \$21 attending to Box 3174 S., Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3H5, Canada. GOH's: A.E. van Vogt, Spider & Jeanne Robinson, Alfred Bester. Impressive guest list, ditto price.

WISCON 80; Mar. 7-9; \$8 to 2/29, \$10 at door; to Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701. GOH's: Joan D. Vinge, Octavia Butler, Bev DeWeese, Dave Hartwell. Traditionally, a very good con.

UPPERSOUTHCLAVE; Mar. 14-16; \$5? to Box 8423, Louisville, KY 40208. GOH: P.L. Carruthers. They've got a 24-hour party room!

COASTCON '80; Mar. 14-16; \$10 to 3/1, \$12.50 at door; to Box 6025, Biloxi, MS 39532. No other information available right now.

MIDWESTERCON I; Mar. 14-16; \$5.50 to 2/29, \$7 thereafter; to 50 Capri Dr., Florissant, MO 63033. GOH: Phyllis Eisenstein. Usual events.

LUNACON '80; Mar. 14-16; \$10 to 2/29, \$13 at door; to Box 204, Brooklyn, NY 11230. GOH's: Larry Niven, Vincent DiFate. A good con.

AGGIECON XI; Mar. 27-30; \$6 to 3/1, \$7 at door; to Box 5718, College Station, TX 77844. GOH: Poul Anderson. They're doing something right, this is number 11!

NORWESCON III; Mar. 28-30; \$8 to 3/27, \$9 at door; to PO Box 24207, Seattle, WA 98124. GOH's: Alfred Bester, Fred Pohl. Can they top last year's con, with 12 authors (give or take one or two)?

KUBLA KHANATE; May 2-4; \$10 to 647 Devon Drive, Nashville, TN 37230. GOH: Stephen King; TM: Andrew Offut. Like SF art? Ken Moore's got it! Another 24-hour party room, and a midnight masquerade. Lookin' good!

MARCON 15; May 2-4; \$8 to 4/1, \$10 after; to Box 2583, Columbus, OH 43216. GOH's: L. Sprague de Camp, Brian Earl Brown; TM: Catherine de Camp. This could be a real winner.

LEPRECON VI; May 2-4; 3112 N. 26th Pl., Phoenix, AZ 85016. No other information available at this time.

WESTERCON 33; July 4-6; \$15 to 5/1, \$20 after; to Box 2009, Van Nuys, CA 91404. GOH's: Roger Zelazny, Bob Vardeman. TM: Frank Denton. The West Coast's biggest con. Something for everyone.

MOSCON II; Sept. 12-14; \$8 to 9/1, \$10 at door; to PO Box 9141, Moscow ID 83843. GOH's: George Barr, Jerry Sohl. Modesty forbids my saying that this is one of the world's best cons; you see, I'm the chairman.

NOREASCON II; Aug. 29-Sept. 1; \$30 attending to Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge, MA 02139. GOH's: Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, Bruce Pelz. TM: Robert Silverberg. This is the WorldCon. If you attend any con this year, this is the one you should try for. Better than Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey.

That's it for zines and such this issue; I hope you've enjoyed yourselves. Remember to keep those zines and letters coming. If I didn't review your zine, it's only because of lack of space, so keep trying—I'll get to you sooner or later. **CLEAR ETHER!** ☹



"STAR TREK - THE MOTION PICTURE" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Film Analysis by Steven Dimeo

"IF ONLY"—the phrase is the essence not just of science fiction but of our own often limited human lives. It epitomizes that scientifically idealistic future three hundred years hence of a United Federation of Planets and the U.S.S. Enterprise's five-year mission to seek out other intelligent life forms, itself a goal epitomizing the technological optimism of the late sixties that culminated in the July 20, 1969, manned lunar landing.

Unfortunately, "if only" has also characterized the on-again, off-again attempts to resurrect "Star Trek" first as another TV series, then as a movie, in the wake of popularity that has actually burgeoned an unprecedented 77% the last five years for a series whose final 79th episode aired one month before Apollo 11 took off. If only Paramount hadn't hemmed and hawed so long, a "Star Trek" movie could have easily beat "Star Wars" to the screen as the spectacle that launched this renaissance in science fiction. If only the studio had awarded the visual effects contract to special effects wizard Douglas Trumbull ("2001," "Silent Running," "Close Encounters") and his student John Dykstra ("Star Wars") in the first place rather than to Robert Abel, "Star Trek — The Motion Picture" would never have, at a cost of \$42 million, become according to *Variety* the second most expensive film ever made. If only—well, you get the picture. And with this picture we finally get after creator-producer Gene Roddenberry's four-year struggle to seek out intelligent life among Paramount executives, another "if only" hovers in the wings as we realize how much better the results might have been had the wait not been so long, had the expectations not been so great.

But with the Academy Awards already upon us and the competition at least in

special effects virtually a dead heat among "Alien," "The Black Hole" and the "Star Trek" film, the verdict is indisputable by now: despite its flaws—a visual self-indulgence and too many missed opportunities for realistic characterization that make the first 80 minutes so tedious—"Star Trek — TMP" still emerges from the deep space of "Star Wars" rip-offs as the most ambitiously intelligent SF film since Stanley Kubrick's even more tedious but seminal "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968). The "Star Trek" phenomenon seems destined not only to continue into the eighties but to set the tone for our new decade.

However derivative the plot may be, for instance, the source of the mysteriously powerful threat to planet Earth—a cloud 82 A.U.'s wide (an astronomical unit being, of course, the mean distance from the earth to the sun)—and the meaning behind the curious phrase featured in the newspaper and magazine ads ("The Human Adventure is Just Beginning") which ends the movie—these two ele-

Spock (Leonard Nimoy) prepares to flunk one of his few tests, a rite of wrongs called Kolina on his home planet Vulcan.



ments alone harbor the movie's vaulting ambitions. At one time entitled "The God Thing," the story, which has made the rounds of writers from the late noted SF author Leigh Brackett to the team that scripted the thriller "Don't Look Now" (1975), is now attributed to 33-year-old Alan Dean Foster, the successor to the late James Blish who started the *Star Trek* novelizations, now author in his own right to the "Star Wars" sequel *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* and the novelizations of "Alien" and "The Black Hole." From Foster's story, Harold Livingston, whose dubious TV movie credits include "Escape from Mindanao" and "The Soul of Nigger Charley," wrote the final screenplay. But SF aficionados will easily recognize reflections from Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and "2001" as well as from some of the original "Star Trek" episodes themselves, particularly two from the second season: John Meredith Lucas' "The Changeling" in which the space probe Nomad merges with an alien probe to become an entity that must destroy anything imperfect, whether living or not; and Norman Spinrad's "The Doomsday Machine" in which an enormous cylindrical robot feeds mindlessly off whole planets to survive as it heads directly towards Earth. Here, the source of the destructive cloud proves to be a strange mechanical intelligence called "V'ger" who, suffering its own form of an identity crisis after accumulating all the knowledge it can store in its sweep across the universe, returns to Earth to find its Creator.

Better than an hour of the film, however, is spent on establishing the magnitude of the menace it poses for Earth and on getting the Enterprise out of dry dock and into the cloud. Along the way it's impossible for Trumbull and Dykstra to refrain from showing off their technical virtuosity—not, it should be added, without good reason. One of the most impressive and relevant examples is the opening scene of the soon-to-be-obliterated Klingon vessel when the camera actually swings up, over and behind the craft in a single cut, mobility made possible by the sophisticated proficiency of computerized synchronization of models, color screens and matte paintings. They even improve on the jump to

hyperspace in "Star Wars" in their more visually "moving" translation of the Enterprise at warp speed for the large theatre screen, especially effective at the denouement (the imaging is echoed in the film's poster art).

Only fans will be impressed, though, with the first detailed close-ups of the refurbished Enterprise, a languid scene that takes forever to get Admiral James Kirk (William Shatner) and Scotty (James Doohan) off their shuttle craft and on board. The same holds true for the endless approach over the "living" surface of the "machine planet" at the core of the cloud—impressive initially for its unquestionable imaginativeness and for the convincing realism of the miniatures and effects but boring as hell when it lasts so long.

Plot contrivances also seem to get in the way of the real story at the "heart" of the cloud (no accidental metaphor as it turns out). Kirk's assuming command of the Enterprise over the present Commander Willard Decker (a jarringly innocent-looking Stephen Collins) and Scotty's monotonous reminders that the engines "canna" take the strain of warp drive yet both recall the series' weaker moments when such things were thrown in for phony suspense if everything else failed. The grisly malfunctioning of the transporters while a Vulcan science officer is being beamed aboard and a "wormhole" funicular of energy inadvertently formed while the Enterprise attempts light speed within the solar system too near planetoid matter—these touches, while contrived as well, are at least original and suspenseful enough in that they reinforce our doubts as to the ship's readiness or Kirk's qualifications at the helm after two-and-a-half years at a desk job on Earth. But nothing else is made of the preparedness of either once the starship reaches V'ger.

It's the last fifty minutes that redeem the movie (interestingly, the length of time an hour-long TV slot would have filled) when the subplots concerning Spock (Leonard Nimoy) and the relationship between Decker and Ilia (Indian beauty Persis Khambatta) neatly dovetail in a borderline-brilliant revelation that deals with nothing less than the very reason for our being. Al-



Commander Decker (Stephen Collins) and Ilia (Persis Khambatta) meet in an ecstatic climax that offers a new dimension to the Big Bang theory.

though at first distracting, subtitled translations of the Klingon and Vulcan languages in the opening sequences presumably mean to emphasize the universality of the world of "man" that becomes the film's real subject. In that respect, though, the movie doesn't really begin until V'ger abducts Ilia off the bridge with a plasma-bolt life form and returns instead a robot probe in her image to determine the necessity of continuing the "carbon units" (humans) on board the Enterprise or on Earth where it believes such units only interfere with its attempt to contact the Creator. Decker tries to reawaken human memories in the drone in hopes of reaching a more sympathetic link with both his lost Deltan love and V'ger. Only after Spock takes an uncharacteristically risky EVA (that's "extravehicular activity" for those who have too soon forgotten) in a thruster suit (an inventive touch) and tries a mind probe with V'ger do they realize that the entity is like a brilliant but undeveloped child (shades of "Charlie X" from "Star Trek's"

first year) in its demands, lacking the emotional qualities of a more understanding human—qualities that had at the outset of the movie prevented Spock himself from passing the ritual of Kolinar back on his home planet Vulcan, a kind of bar mitzvah of "total logic." What it asks is what we all eventually ask. As Spock puts it, "Is this all that I am? Is there nothing more?" It wants a simple answer from a simple Creator to the complexities it has assimilated. Kirk then bluffs (like a parent?) without knowing what he's getting into by saying he knows who the Creator is but first insists he see V'ger in person (a weak moment in the script since a move like that could have imperiled the crew if he didn't already know who V'ger was). At least he doesn't say, "Take me to your leader!" The mechanized Ilia thereupon complies, of course, by taking them to her leader! V'ger is, as everyone knows by now, our own Voyager 6 which had been sucked into a black hole, reemerging on the other side of the universe where it joined with the "machine

planet," a creature that remains too ambiguous though it's really the driving force behind the transfiguration of the NASA probe. The revelation is a potential groaner that the movie somehow overcomes once the crew members feed it the code to make it release all its data and it refuses to relinquish its only purpose for "something more." That "something more" is grasping for the next rung on the evolutionary ladder, a union between man and machine far beyond the cyborgs of pulp fiction and the bionic bastardizations of television fare. Here it's ingeniously manifested in the joining of Decker and Ilia. The climax where story and special effects fuse beautifully comes within a hair's breadth of unintentional comedy with its obvious sexual

overtones were it not for the visual innovativeness and the philosophical implications for the crew—and for us. (Considering Deltans thrive on oaths of celibacy, this scene offers us a rather different variation on the Big Bang theory; restraint apparently does a hell of a lot more than make the Earth move!) After we have vicariously experienced the potential of such transcendence, Lt. Uhuru (Nichelle Nichols) asks the commander where the Enterprise should go now. Regardless of its impracticality (he has no orders to leave Earth orbit), Kirk's throwaway last line somehow works because of its light self-mockery, it affected off-handedness: "Out there—thataway!" "Star Trek — TMP" is upbeat not because it makes us feel good

Spock (Nimoy), Decker (Collins), McCoy (Kelley), Kirk (Shatner) follow Ilia (Ms. Khambatta) to the true identity of the powerful alien V'ger and an ending that rivals "2001" in its beauty and implications for man.



in the same way "Star Wars" did as mere escapist recreation, but because it reminds us we humans can still be more than what we are.

Ironically, where the movie is not what it could be is in its human aspects. V'ger's identity crisis, for example, would be less intellectual, more indistinguishably realistic, were we to see a human foil in more detail than Spock's flunking a rite of wrongs. Kirk has been "stranded" at a desk job for over two years; he would, it seems, have been the best candidate for undergoing his own more human self-examination exacerbated, perhaps, by that opening conflict with Decker over command of the Enterprise. As it is, we learn nothing of Kirk's thoughts, his probable feelings of loss after "stepping up" from running a starship. Played by Shatner in his same annoyingly clipped, blustery style, Kirk remains a flat character throughout.

The love affair between Decker and Ilia is likewise too generalized to avoid corniness, at least in the beginning. What exactly was the relationship like since Deltans apparently elevate celibacy? Why, for that matter, are Deltans bald? Differentiating characters only by physical eccentricities is not enough, although Roddenberry has demonstrated a penchant for doing just that. Spock's pointed ears and for some reason Ilia's baldness work, but in his TV movie "Genesis II" (1973) when the female character Lyra-A (Mariette Hartley) who plays nursemaid to the cryonically reawakened Dylan Hunt (Alex Cord) and discloses her "true nature"—she has two navels—the effect is purely ludicrous.

The rest of the Enterprise crew are never much better than their originally conceived stock characterizations either. However we may share Scotty's smile at his happiness to be serving under his old captain again, he's still just another stereotyped Scot who loves his work as Mr. Chekov (Walter Koenig) uses a similarly stereotyped Russian accent to veil another cardboard Cossack. There's even something missing in Spock at first, his coldness vastly overdone when he comes aboard by courier ship though he later warms to his own need for human attributes. It's almost as if Nemoy who, in spite of his autobiographical book's titular declaration, is still bristling at the fact that ac-

cepting this role again even for this much money might mean he really is Spock!

Only two characters stand out in the picture—Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy (DeForest Kelley) and Ilia. If we're frustrated when McCoy, reluctant to come aboard through the earlier faulty transporter, storms in, bearded and haggard—we never know why he looks like that, what he's been doing either since leaving the Enterprise—he steals the scene and wins our sympathy when he grouches about being "drafted," later when he grudgingly confesses he's glad to see even a Spock distanced from humans by mental contact with the cloud being, or later still when, vexed at the news that V'ger is a "child," he growls, "What are we supposed to do then, spank it?" And although Ilia has no identifiable past either, when she returns to the starship as spokesman for V'ger, embodying both the machine and the human she once was, she becomes a more imposing figure only partially because Ms. Khambatta wears her short white tunic well. The character, struggling with herself, for and against V'ger, effortlessly shoulders the rest of the story.

Part of the problem with the other characters may be that director Robert Wise, who has previously directed such classic SF/horror films such as "The Day the Earth Stood Still" (1951), "The Haunting" (1963), "The Andromeda Strain" (1970) and "Audrey Rose" (1977), is himself being directed by the characters he inherited. He does no directing at all here; it's likely no director could have.

Despite these drawbacks of a tale padded with ostentatious special effects, awkward plot machinations, and superficial characters riding on the tentativeness of a TV past, the final chapter of "Star Trek — TMP" redeems everyone's effort here—not just the scriptwriter and cast but our own hopes in a way. "Star Trek" may well be the Force we want to be with us now, what helps us all break free of the Cynical (Selfish?) Seventies, the booster rocket to put us all back on the trajectory that Voyager 6 was programmed to take by its creators—reaching out into this universe to learn more about the creation and our part in it, acknowledging our role as beings whose purpose must be to transcend our earthly bounds. It's about time, this film

seems to be telling us, that we looked backward again to Emily Dickinson's 19th century foresight, speaking as much to our temporarily grounded drive to people the stars when she wrote,

Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea,—
Past the houses, past the headlands,
Into deep eternity!

Bred as we, among the mountains,
Can the sailor understand
The divine intoxication
Of the first league out from land?

"The Human Adventure is Just Beginning" indeed. Let's just hope that this "if only" can be more realized than regretted!



THE FATHER LODGE

Our editorial consultant reports on a science fiction writers' symposium he attended last summer where the famous, such as Fred Pohl, Theodore Sturgeon and Gordon Dickson, worked long days and nights with the not-so-famous in a critical analysis of the art.

by Robert Wilcox

ANYONE WHO has read much science fiction—and I've read more than most people—begins to wonder where they get those "crazy" ideas. By "they," of course, I mean the writers. Time-hoppers, dimension straddlers, dwellers in incredibly tiny universes, sentient plants, worlds that think and feel—these and a host of wilder topics may outrage the capacities of even superficial readers. Try to maintain your sanity, for example during a close reading of Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps", as you

follow our hero pursuing himself through a time gate into the future. Or match the pace of Harold Shea as de Camp and Pratt propel him into the magical environment of Norse gods in *The Incomplete Enchanter*.

Readers of this sort of literature require special conditioning—in a setting like Kansas University, for example. That's what a host of the faithful discovered last July, when they attended a special science fiction seminar directed by James Gunn. The "faithful", of course, were educators from high schools and colleges of several States and Canada. All of them (us) were addicted to science fiction, and some had tried a hand at spinning a yarn or two. The conditioning they received came from jamming 165 hours of classes into three weeks—possible only because extreme pressure forced everyone into a special time warp.

Some idea of this pressure is conveyed by the preparation of this class. Before the seminar began, members were expected to have digested some 30 novels and about 1000 pages of short stories, and to demonstrate under fire their understanding of what they had read. "Under fire" meant broadsides from the authors of the works, who included Fred Pohl, Gordon Dickson, Ted Sturgeon, Lloyd Biggle, and Gunn himself. It's one thing to have opinions about science fiction, if you keep those thoughts to yourself. It is quite another when the authors of those works confront you and demolish, one by one, the conclusions you have reached about their writing.

It was enlightening, for example, to discuss *Lifeship*, co-authored by Dickson and Harrison, with Dickson himself replying to comments about the book's weaknesses: trouble with gender, too great compression, too little motivation. Often, readers forget the humanity of the authors, and an understanding of the conflict between Dickson's aristocratic leaning and Harrison's socialistic one emerged from the heat of discussion rarely available to the casual reader of science fiction.

A lot more of Dickson was evident than this discussion. I learned he had taught himself to read at four years of age, and that he subsisted on a diet of classics until he reached maturity. Although he feels

most writing classes are abominable, he believes he is the only writer of science fiction who has received a degree in creative writing. One might say Gordon learned to write in spite of poor teachers; he has enormous capacity and loves writing. He puts a lot of time on his craft, but works slowly—about two typed pages per hour—and rewrites three or more times. Most of his yarns “incubate” for up to a year before he starts putting thought to paper and, interestingly, he begins at the end of a story and writes backward.

Some writers have unsuspected layers, as revealed when Fred Pohl threw himself into the flames. An only child, he was precocious and always the youngest in any group. Fred was a fast starter, beginning to devour science fiction at 10 and to write it at 12. He achieved heady success with his first sale at \$2.00, and has been pouring out stories ever since. He uses no outlines, but forces himself into a sort of conflict which leads to a work's completion. He often writes by trial and error, but finds he must turn out at least four pages every day. Fred strongly supports the teaching of science fiction, and agrees that the craft approach is the best way of developing writers. To get at some of those layers referred to, Pohl is a noted speaker, has been a literary agent, was a prominent science fiction magazine editor (*Galaxy*), in addition to his documented writing career.

Students at the seminar knew they were mining the source of “crazy” ideas when contemplating the work habits of Gunn, Pohl, Dickson, and the rest. Lester del Rey, who was not there, writes hundreds of versions of page one of a story before he is content to continue. Sturgeon often works from a page filled with random gibberish. Jack Williamson constructs several first paragraphs for his stories, selecting the best example for the final version. James Gunn can't get going until he first finds a suitable title for a work.

These and other bits of information revealed writers of science fiction to be very unusual people, folks likely to have “crazy” ideas. Dickson, for example, was in college at age 15; Pohl was an editor at 19; Gunn was taking college courses at 16. Sturgeon became fascinated with the term

“love”, and spent two years researching its definition. All of these individuals are interested in change, which is probably the best explanation for where they get “those crazy ideas”. Most of them have file drawers stuffed with ideas for stories—ideas they will probably never get to in their lifetimes.

A few examples of stories which did develop, however, may be interesting to know about. I learned that Larry Niven got the idea for *Ringworld* from speculations by astrophysicist Freeman Dyson, who held that a truly advanced civilization could use all the energy radiated by its sun. Its planets could be rebuilt into a sphere completely enclosing the sun, and the inhabitants would live inside that sphere. Niven changed the sphere into a ring, and was off and running. Gunn's fantasy, “The Beautiful Brew”, was stimulated by a Virgil Partch cartoon which showed two men looking at a mug of beer on which the foam had shaped itself into a bust and girl's head. Dickson was inspired to write *Naked to the Stars* after readings Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*.

In addition to the insights we obtained of writers' idiosyncracies, we had a ring-side seat at the Campbell Award ceremony. Reaching a decision on the winner of this award is a tricky business, since the panel of judges is scattered as far as England. Some of these individuals had not yet sent their ballots as the day of the award presentation approached, so we had the same feeling of mounting suspense that one would experience if his own work were being considered for the prize. And when Moorcock won with *Gloriana*, all of us cheered as though we had booted the choice home.

All in all, being in the company of giants was an uplifting experience. Our critical faculties were honed to a fine edge, we were drunk from overdrafts of science fiction, and most of us became surface-effect creatures as we turned back to our relatively humdrum lives. I can highly recommend the experience to jaded souls who feel the fires of science fiction are banked for them. The next spaceship will leave in time to meet other aliens at the University of Kansas on July 7-25, 1980. James Gunn still wields the magic wand.



sphere. The fluorocarbon itself—a combination of fluorine molecules attached to carbon chains—does not interact with the atmosphere . . . or anything else for that matter.

Because the fluorocarbons are so simple and inert, they make an ideal substitute for blood. They do not react with any substances in the human body and they do not interfere with the body's metabolism.

Physically, fluorocarbon blood is clear and colorless like water, but about twice as dense. In many ways, Dr. Clark says, the fluorocarbons are better than whole blood. One of the main functions of blood is to carry oxygen throughout the body. The oxygen is carried by the red blood cells, which are approximately 10 microns in diameter. In fluorocarbon blood, oxygen hooks up to tiny droplets 1,000 times smaller than red blood cells, and can shoot through even the smallest capillaries that

AMAZING FACTS

by Britton Bloom

In The Pink

ARTIFICIAL BLOOD has been a staple of science fiction for decades. Now it is beginning to enter the world of hospitals and doctors. In Japan, a man's life was saved last year by transfusions of artificial blood when he began hemorrhaging after surgery.

Research on artificial blood has been going on for the past fifteen years around the world. In the United States, the search has centered around the work of Dr. Robert Geyer, a biochemist at Harvard, and Dr. Leland Clark, a biochemist and physiologist at the University of Cincinnati.

The substances that show the most promise as blood substitutes are the fluorocarbon compounds. Now before anyone plugs into a can of spray deodorant to cure a case of anemia, the propellant in aerosol sprays is chlorofluorocarbon, and it is the chloro- part of the molecule that is playing havoc with the ozone layer of the atmo-

red blood cells have to ooze through single-file.

In addition to carrying oxygen, blood also transports nutrients to hungry tissues. This presented a problem, since fluorocarbons only dissolve gasses. Clark solved the dilemma by mixing the fluorocarbon liquid with a saline solution—simple salt water—to produce a compound that would carry oxygen and the sugars, fats, and minerals necessary to sustain life.

Whole blood has a number of disadvantages for use in hospitals—it is hard to get, and difficulty matching blood types can present a fatal problem for someone waiting for a transfusion. In addition, whole blood transfusions carry the threat of hepatitis infection. Artificial blood, on the other hand, is as abundant as a manufacturer can make it, can be mixed with anyone's blood without regard to types, and completely eliminates the risk of hepatitis.

Beyond its use in transfusions, fluorocarbon blood is an ideal medium for storing organs slated for transplantation, making possible the development of organ storage banks.

So how long will it take for artificial blood to get into circulation? Dr. Clark says his work on fluorocarbons as blood substitutes is nearly complete, and he foresees the use of artificial blood in the U.S. within two to five years.

One interesting side effect of fluorocarbon blood: since it is clear and colorless, it tends to bleach out any healthy pink glow in its recipients. The red eyes of rats given the substitute blood become clear white. If fluorocarbons become the standard substitute for blood, a lot of red-blooded macho types are going to have to settle for a sort of calculated pink.

Footloose Real Estate

GO TAKE a look at a map of the world. It seems so easy to reconstruct that theoretical ancient supercontinent Pangaea which broke into the present land masses we live on.

South American fits nicely into the niche on the coast of west Africa, North America could have easily broken away from the area north of Spain, and the northern coast of South America would fit snugly into the Gulf area of southern North America.

It all comes together in a nice, tidy mass on the theoretical map. Except for the long corridor of Central America. No amount of squeezing can fit the land that links North and South America into the required space on Pangaea.

All of which has led many earth scientists to ask: Where did Mexico come from?

Somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, is the best guess now, according to Wulf Gose and Gary Scott, two researchers from the Marine Science Institute of the University of Texas at Austin.

Using techniques of paleomagnetism that allow Gose and Scott to calculate the magnetic orientation of ancient stones relative to the earth's pole, they have examined some 2,500 samples of earth throughout Central America since 1975.

They found that Central America is made of four parts that moved into the space left by the separation of North America and South America about 200

million years ago. The four parts roughly correspond to Mexico, the Yucatan, Honduras, and Nicaragua-Costa Rica.

Before these areas joined the American continents, they appear to have been rotating in the Pacific. Mexico, for example, rotated in a 60-degree counterclockwise direction somewhere south of the equator until about 180 million years ago when it came north to fill in the gap left by the separation of the Americas. The area now called Honduras first rotated clockwise, then counterclockwise, about 165 million years ago.

According to the paleomagnetic evidence, Mexico was the first land mass to take its modern position. Honduras apparently started out at the latitude it now occupies, then moved a little to the north before coming to rest in its present location. Nicaragua-Costa Rica moved into place last.

Gose and Scott cannot determine exactly where the component pieces of Central America were located originally, since the magnetic orientation only indicates approximate latitudes in relation to the pole. However, the geology of Central America seems to indicate that the plates which make up the area came from a single land mass, or land masses of very similar make-ups.

Jungle Victory

ECOLOGY HAS hit Brazil in a big way.

Concern is starting to grow in Brazil and neighboring countries to save the lush forests of the Amazon River basin from developers' bulldozers and the ravages of lumbering.

The move to preserve the jungle was partly inspired by ecological sensibilities, and partly by the realities of the jungle itself.

One of the problems of ecologists working in less developed countries (L.D.C.s) is the feeling on the part of the L.D.C.s that environmental considerations are motivated more by a desire on the part of industrialized countries to inhibit the development of a struggling country's economy.

Why should developing countries be hindered by considerations that never

occurred to the developed countries when they were beginning to industrialize? the L.D.C.s argue.

Brazil can by no stretch of the imagination be considered less developed. Its cities and industries are well established and flourishing, demanding and filling a place in the modern, industrialized world.

But large segments of Brazil are underdeveloped. The Amazon River basin, originally two million square miles of untouched land, was a developer's dream. Lush lands and thick forests just begged to be used.

So an ambitious development project was planned. Parts of the forest would be cleared and used to grow rice and grains, cattle pastures would grow where only snakes slithered. But to develop this vast tract, roads were needed, and the developers planned a network of highways to criss-cross the jungle.

In the progress of these and other projects, more than 250,000 square miles of the forest were devastated.

But then the reality of the jungle got in the way of the fine plans.

The fertility of the jungle is based on recycling the forest vegetation. The warm humidity of the Amazon basin fosters the growth of fungi, which break down dead vegetation quickly and return the nutrients to the life cycle within about six weeks, as opposed to the months or years needed to recycle nourishment in the Wheat Belt of North America.

Such a short recycling time means the actual fertility of the forest floor extends only about an inch or so deep in the soil. Fine for jungle growth, but totally unsuitable for cultivating wheat, rice, and cattle fodder.

With its agricultural plans scotched by poor soil, the government's plans for developing the Amazon basin floundered. Interest in completing the network of highways has slacked off leaving many half-finished roads to return to the jungle.

Replacing the grandiose schemes is a greater respect for the jungle and its own resources. The drugs, fibers, crops, and fuels available now in the forest can be used without major damage to the ecology of the area, and a newly-formed Amazon

Forest Policy Committee of Brazil has issued a report recommending preservation of hundreds of thousands of square miles of jungle and a moratorium on new corporate leases on basin land.

So the jungle won. It forced developers to re-evaluate their plans and take the jungle environment into account when making decisions that affect the face of the Earth.

The forest is safer from the ravages of man, and future generations of Brazilians will have a natural habitat instead of super-highways.

NASA's Apple

WHEN THE needs of a problem are beyond the available science and technology, new knowledge and techniques are developed or the problem is left unsolved. The math of seventeenth century Europe, for example, was not up to the problem of describing the orbits of planets, so Isaac Newton had to invent calculus in order to work out the details of their paths.

Frequently it seems the new techniques needed to solve the problem, almost casually invented, are more important than the problem they were originally designed to





work on. Newton's calculus, again, is so overwhelmingly vital to so many fields, the original need for the calculus seems almost less important than the math he discovered.

NASA is currently faced with a similar situation.

Comets are fascinating, beautiful, and mysterious. Since they may contain the elements of the primordial universe (including basic organic compounds that may have "infected" Earth with the building blocks of life) NASA would like to study the chemistry of passing comets. Halley's Comet in particular, since it is due to pass in 1985.

However, due to budgetary foot-dragging on the part of the government, the critical deadline for beginning that project has passed. So NASA scientists have decided to settle for switching their probe from Halley's Comet to another comet, Tempel 2, with only a brief glance at Halley's.

Now the problem starts. In order to keep a spacecraft up and flying for the necessary time to study both comets (NASA estimates the whole mission could take four years and cover 2.5 billion kilometers) the amount of fuel needed would weigh too much for an ordinary spacecraft engine to get off the Earth.

So NASA has opted to develop and use an ion propulsion system.

The solar-electric propulsion system NASA is studying would produce its thrust (less than half a kilogram—low by conven-

tional spacecraft standards) from a stream of ionized mercury vapor. With such a propulsion system, the entire mission could get by with only 1,000 kilograms of fuel.

Solar-electric propulsion already exists on a small scale, but to use it to power a spacecraft of the size envisioned would require the development of a new technology, a technology that would have applications far beyond the study of comets.

But (and there's always a but...) money is a problem.


To develop this new technology, NASA says the work on the propulsion system must begin by 1981 and the budget for the project is already at the Office of Budget and Management being prepared for the scrutiny of Congress.

And in a time of tight money, well, perhaps it was better Newton did not require a grant from Congress to work on calculus.





Illustrated by Gary Freeman



by James Quinn

**a SPECIAL
KIND OF
LONLINESS**



TWO MEN were waiting for Rusty when he stepped off the shuttle. He was anxious to go home, but he knew he'd have to answer some questions first. He hoped it would be over soon so he could try to forget the whole affair.

Very few of his co-workers had ever been to Mahogany Row. Corporate decisions flowed from these plush offices and affected every electric power user in the world. Rusty felt acutely self conscious walking through the richly paneled halls in the company of his escorts.

They took him straight past a receptionist and into an inner office. "Mr. Robinson, I've been expecting you. My name is Simon, Al Simon. I'm in charge of public relations." He reached out to shake Rusty's hand and awkwardly had to switch to his left hand when he saw Rusty's cast.

Simon sent the two men away and directed Rusty to sit in a stuffed leather chair. Rusty hadn't adapted to full gravity yet and he settled easily in the cushion.

"Let me begin by saying we are very grateful to you, Mr. Robinson. I'm sure you realize that the disaster you prevented would have caused us a great deal of embarrassment. We're indebted to you, and I can assure you that you will be compensated for your efforts—and your pain." He gestured toward the cast.

"This is nothing," Rusty said. "No permanent damage done."

"Good. Glad to hear it." Simon lit a cigarette and offered one to Rusty. "No thanks, Mr. Simon. If you don't mind I'd like to get this over with as soon as possible. I'd hoped to take the tube to Halifax this evening."

"Of course. I'm sure that can be arranged. But you can appreciate that we have to ask you a few questions." Simon put a tape recorder on his desk and inserted a cassette. "By the way. I understand that a member of the press contacted you while you were in the station clinic. I appreciate your refusal to talk to him."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not talk to the press about this at all, if I don't have to."

"That would be fine. My office will issue a release about this at the appropriate time. Your silence will make my job easier." Simon pointed a microphone at Rusty. "Shall we begin?" Rusty nodded and Simon started recording.

"How long have you worked in maintenance, Mr. Robinson?"

"Just over nine years."

"I understand that you have transferred to another department, however."

"Yes. This was my last shift. After my vacation I'm scheduled to go to work at the new industrial park the company is building."

"Were you dissatisfied with your job?"

"Ah, that's kind of a strong word," Rusty said, wondering if any of this would go into his work record. "Let's just say I'm ready for a change."

"It's my understanding that it takes a very patient kind of person to work in the shacks."

"I have to agree with you."

"Would you say it's a hard job? Or especially, ah, stressful?"

There are plenty of rules up here, and we have to decide for ourselves which to break and which to obey. The company wrote some of the rules, others are informal. The trick is to find out (in advance, hopefully) which rules will kill you if you break them.

We aren't allowed to stay on duty for more than 40 consecutive days, and we have to rotate partners in the middle of each shift so there's always one person in the satellite with less than 20 days in zero-g. Both the company and the union agree this rule is important, so everyone obeys it.

Another rule says everyone has to be suited up during crew transfers. That's a company rule. They figure if there's an accident and we lose pressure, nobody will suffocate. I don't obey that one. I've never heard of an accident like that, and it takes a long time to get in and out of a suit, even in zero-g. I stay in the closet during transfers. It's airtight, and if there's an accident my suit's right there.

Here's an informal rule: Use first names. Mine's Rusty. We have to be as friendly as possible. The shacks aren't much bigger than camping trailers, and we're cooped up with our partner for twenty days at a stretch. Conflicts get out of control up here, so we avoid them. Hunter doesn't obey the first name rule, but neither would I if my name was Casper.

I'm really glad to see Hunter go. Oh, we get along ok. No fights, anyway. We're experts at avoiding fights. I just don't like him. The first thing he does when he starts his shift is bitch about how hard the company doctors made him work in the centrifuge. But he never touches the springs. I guess he doesn't like the company rules about daily exercise. What's worse, his hobby is French cooking, and he constantly makes some of the richest food imaginable. He likes to eat it all, too. He's one of the few men that can gain weight in zero-g. I lose my appetite, like most folks.

Here's another rule: no overtime. At the end of a shift nothing short of an international power outage can keep us in the shacks. There are plenty of reasons for that rule. Funny things happen to the body in zero-g. Bones lose mineral content, muscles lose tone, and blood chemistry gets a little weird. After 40 days we need the centrifuge.

We also need human company. It's possible to measure calcium loss, but other things are harder to measure, though just as serious. There's a special kind of loneliness in the shacks. I hadn't anticipated it when I began this job, but the last few weeks with Hunter were the loneliest weeks of my life. Hunter and I know more about each other than we ever wanted to know. The nearest other people are impossibly far away, but on clear nights I can crank the telescope up enough to almost resolve the driving lights of cars in Halifax.

After nine years in the shacks I figure I've lost as much bone calcium as I can, and empty loneliness replaced it. But it's all over after this shift. Men shouldn't have to work in such a lonely place, and I'll be glad when the company finally decides to let Mac handle the powersats.

I forgot to tell you about Mac. He's the Monitoring and Correcting Computer, but like I said, we use first names. He does all the real work up here. We just watch him to make sure he doesn't screw up. He never does. Sometimes, we get to replace a worn-out part. Most of the moving parts are in the life support systems, so that's where most of the repairs are needed. A few years ago the company realized that it could save money by letting Mac take over, and they'll probably do the job soon. It might be tough on some of the newer workers, but I'll be able to hold another job because of my seniority.

"It's not so hard," Rusty said. "Some of the guys really like it. You just have to keep yourself occupied."

Simon smiled politely, then said, "The main thing we are interested in, of course, is the Monitoring and Correcting Computer. I'm told you are the man who programmed it for speech."

"That's right. I can't take credit for the program. It's based on a copyrighted program I changed just enough to stay legal."

"I assume the re-programming altered the computer in ways unrelated to speech."

"Yes, slightly. I had to give Mac—that's what we call it—more capability for independent action. I told my supervisor about it at the time."

"I'm curious to know what prompted you to teach the machine to talk."

"Mac's a better conversationalist than some of the shift partners I've had," Rusty said, thinking about Hunter. "It seemed to make the shift go faster."

"Did anyone object to your alteration of the Monit . . . to altering Mac's programming?"

"Not to me personally. I was told that some of the design engineers on the ground objected, but that the union overruled them. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

"Yes. It may have been."

"Mac, is the transfer over yet?" There was no window in the suit closet.

"Hunter is in the shuttle," Mac said. "A worker I have never seen before is unloading supplies."

"That would be Ramos. How does she look?"

"Please be more specific."

"Never mind. I'll see for myself." I was anxious to meet Ramos. She was one of the first women to work in the shacks. For a long time, the company claimed it didn't hire women for the job because it would cost too much to change the toilet plumbing. It was really because they knew if healthy men and women (and you had to be healthy to work here—another rule) were cooped up together for 20 days in a row in zero-g, soon they'd start doing what healthy men and women have always done. I thought it would make a good fringe benefit, and was glad when a judge didn't buy the plumbing story.

"The lock is sealed now, Rusty," Mac said.

I cranked the door open just in time to see Ramos take off her helmet. From the neck up, she had real possibilities: dark skin, big brown eyes, and a braided black pony tail half a meter long. From the neck down it was hard to tell because of the space suit.

"Let me help you out of that," I said, floating over beside her to get at the zipper. "You're Ramos?"

"Una," she said. "Robinson?"

"Rusty." I finished with the zipper and helped her squirm out of the suit. She was the best looking engineer I'd ever seen. It was hard not to stare. I didn't want to spoil her first impression of me, so I turned my attention to the supplies. "Did you happen to bring any fresh vegetables?" I asked. "I haven't seen a real tomato in months."

"Sorry, no tomatoes. There's some real lettuce, though. Everything else is frozen." I started unpacking the food while she hauled her suit over to the closet.

"Una's an unusual name," I said, hoping she'd take the hint. She did.

"It's South American," she said. "I'm from Atacama. I did my graduate work in Chicago, though."

I wondered if her accent was really as sexy as it seemed, or if I'd been isolated too long. "There are a lot of Chicago grads up here. I went to Los Angeles, myself. I've never been to Atacama, either. Sounds like there's some excitement going on there now."

"We're always either in the middle of a revolution or a depression," she said. "The only difference is depressions are boring."

"That's one way to look at it. Doesn't seem too boring now."

"Wait a few months. It'll get boring. Where are you from?"

"Canada. Nova Scotia, specifically."

"Never been there. Nice name."

When I had almost finished putting the food away I heard the squeaking of the springs. Exercising already; I was beginning to approve of this girl. When I turned around, I shouldn't have been so surprised. I mean, it doesn't make sense to wear coveralls when you work out. I usually work out in shorts, myself. And I know women don't really need any other kind of underwear in zero-g, and I know it wouldn't have been unusual in a spa on Earth. If I hadn't been away so long, cooped up with guys like Hunter, I wouldn't have been so startled. I think she caught me staring. She might not have known the effect she was having on my glands. I doubt it.

Before you conclude I'm a total chauvinist, I should point out that Una would have attracted attention in any situation. Contrasted against the plainness of the shack, she was overpowering. She was muscular in a cat-like, very feminine way, and her South American ancestry made her look exotic to me. She kept looking around the shack with an incredible, curious expression, just like I did on my first shift, before I learned every thumbprint and leaking valve in the shack. I would have been falling in love if I'd been a few years younger.

It seemed the company was still trying to save money on the training program. Una didn't know a lot of things about the network. They hadn't told her Mac could talk. I told my supervisor about it years ago, but the information hadn't trickled down to the training manuals yet.

They'd neglected to tell her that there was almost no work for her to do. When I told her the most complicated maintenance I'd done in a year involved changing a fan motor in the air system, she didn't believe me. She did know the company was planning to eliminate her job and give it to Mac, and she was worried about being laid-off.

"Don't worry about that," I said. "They wouldn't have taken the trouble to hire and train you if they didn't plan to keep you. You'll probably have to take a harder job, in one of the lunar refineries, maybe, but after you've been here awhile, you'll be glad to go."

"I get the feeling you don't like it here."

"I'm bored stiff. Some guys up here knit. Some paint. Some have chess tournaments by radio. Or write novels. My last partner, believe it or not, studied French cooking. Every shift, he hauled in a crate of special ingredients he has shipped up from Earth. Sour cream, chocolate, stuff like that. God knows what it must have cost him. As soon as he got here he pulled out videotaped cooking lessons and started eating."

"What do you do, Rusty?"

"I make electronic games. Mac and I have figured out hundreds of them. I just sold one: my version of the War of the Roses. But I'm getting off the point. We all went to school to be engineers. We're all paid as much as engineers. It's kind of strange we never do any engineering."



She gave me an odd look, then said, "That's not the only reason you don't like it up here. What's really bothering you, Rusty?"

I should have kept my mouth shut. Why was I trying to make her hate the job just because I did? "Let me show you one of my games," I said. "I don't think I'll ever sell this one."

I gave Mac the order and a schematic map of Earth appeared on the screen. Then, a pale atmospheric layer was added. The twin bands of powersats appeared, orbiting fast enough to make it obvious the display represented compressed time.

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone about this. It isn't exactly a secret, but the company might not like it if they found out I was using their computer to figure this stuff out."

The image enlarged and focused on one part of the band. A thin red line representing the laser beam stretched from one satellite to another, skimming the ionosphere. There, the line grew thicker, symbolizing the sun-fired laser reaction which was triggered in the ions. The beam was reflected from satellite to satellite, grazing the atmosphere each time, growing stronger, until it stretched around the world. As the powersats passed over rectennas on the ground they beamed power down as microwaves.

"I know how the network operates, Rusty."

"Patience. We're just getting to the good part."

Suddenly, the alignment of one of the satellites changed, and the beam was aimed at the ground. Pulses of energy were directed at major cities, and angry red splotches appeared in their place.

"I don't know if anyone still believes the company's claim that the beam isn't strong enough to penetrate the atmosphere and do any real damage. Most of the world's electricity comes from the power in that beam, and it's strong enough to turn a city to ashes."

In rapid succession, city after city was fired on, until the globe was covered with scars. Then the beam stopped.

"I'm especially proud of this part," I said. "I doubt that even the generals have thought about this."

The beam was focused on the South Pole from several different powersats. Time was compressed further, until the powersats orbited so fast all you could see was two circles of light. Days passed with the seconds. Slowly, the outlines of the continents shrank to symbolize the rise of sea level. The coastal cities disappeared, as did England—and Nova Scotia. When the damage was done the beam was abruptly shut off and the powersats continued orbiting unused.

"You shouldn't let something like this bother you," Una said. "There are safeguards which make this impossible."

"That's what the company says. As always, the company tells just as much truth as it finds convenient. Oh, sure, if you and I happened to go insane at the same time, and decided to put the heat on Earth, we couldn't do it. Mac would stop us. The worst we could do is put this particular powersat out of commission. But Mac can be outsmarted. He's just a machine. I could get around his safeguards, if I wanted to. A bright junior high kid with a background in programming could probably do it. No one has ever done it because the company has caught everyone who's ever tried. So far. But the company can be outsmarted, too. One or two cities are bound to get fried eventually. When that happens, I want to be as far away from this job as possible. Luna would be nice. Or Newfoundland."

I have a tendency to get preachy. Una looked uncomfortable after my lecture; she probably thought I was a madman. "Maybe it won't happen. If the company hurries up with its plans to automate the network, that will make it harder to sabotage it." Una nodded vaguely and said, "Then you'll probably enjoy installing the components they sent with me."

"Hold it. What components?"

"Yes, about those components," said Simon. "Did they look like company equipment?"

"Exactly. They were integrated circuits sealed in clear plastic with just the components exposed. She even had an installation manual printed just like the ones we normally use. The whole package looked legitimate."

"Did she tell you what the components were for?"

"She said they were part of the automation equipment. She said after we installed them, ground monitors would test them before any more were installed in other powersats."

"Didn't it seem odd to you that your supervisor hadn't told you about the components?"

"Not really. I got a raise once and nobody told me. It went into effect in October and I didn't find out about it until my bank statement came in January. To be honest, I was so glad the company was finally going to automate the system, as soon as Una showed me the components we got suited up to install them."

"The view out here sure beats the window," Una said. We were over the Pacific, and most of the west coast of South America was visible. Una could see her home, and I vaguely wished Nova Scotia would have been visible.

"I'm not very good at geography," I said. "Where's Atacama?"

"Go up the terminator to the big cloud bank," she said, pointing. "Then go straight east to the coast."

"I don't know why I never learned where it is," I said. "It's been in the news enough."

"Most people forget about us," Una said. "They only remember us when Perez orders his army across our border. We aren't strong enough to survive another attack, so if that ever happens again people can forget about us forever."

"It sounds like you were smart to leave."

"I wish my parents could leave."

I felt I'd struck a nerve, so I didn't say anything else until we started working. Mac's external cameras tracked us as we moved from place to place.

"It's pretty obvious this won't take long," I said with disgust.

"You really seem to be enjoying yourself."

"Of course I am. This is why I'm here."

"I hate to stand between a man and his pleasure," Una said. "If you'd rather do this alone, I'd rather do some sight-seeing. I got plenty of this kind of thing in training."

"I would have suggested that myself, but I didn't want to offend you."

She laughed softly and jetted slowly away. I saw her turning toward Earth but soon I was engrossed in the work. As I made each connection I verified it with Mac, then proceeded to the next. In less than a half hour I was finished.

When I finally looked up I saw Una floating by herself far away. She was executing a zero-g gymnastics display unlike anything I'd ever seen before. It was

clear she wasn't fully adapted to zero-g yet, but it was equally clear that she was a natural athlete. She was a beautiful sight, spinning silently against the black background, and I was inwardly embarrassed when I caught myself calculating ways to seduce her before the end of my shift.

Mac's voice interrupted me. "Rusty, the component is connected properly, but I seem to have picked up some deviation in the beam."

"How serious?"

"Within specifications. I'm not sure there is any significant deviation at all. I'm getting conflicting readings. If you have time, we can conduct a test."

"You mean Mac deliberately lied to you?"

"Yes."

"Had he ever done that before?"

"Never."

"What did he tell you to do?"

"He wanted me to patch my helmet microphone through the alignment laser." Simon looked confused so Rusty said, "There's a half kilowatt laser mounted on the edge of the powersat. It's aligned parallel to the main beam but operates at a different frequency. It allows us to measure any deviation. It's possible to modulate the beam by patching a microphone into it. Mac told me to talk over the beam so he could compare the sound of my voice to a voiceprint record in his memory. He said if my voice was distorted it would mean the beam was out of alignment."

"I see."

I was a little nervous working by the laser. It put me in a position in which I was close enough to the main beam to reach out and touch it. Not that I wanted to: I'd pull back a stump if I did.

"You should be able to hear me now, Mac. Testing, 1, 2, 3, 4 . . ."

"There's nothing wrong with the alignment, Rusty," Mac said. "I asked you to speak through the laser because there is a chance you will not want Una to hear what I have to tell you."

The fact that Mac had never lied to me before was just beginning to sink in when he said, "The new component is not as Una described it. It violates several of my design specifications."

"What's it do?"

"It contains a pre-programmed sequence which will automatically align the beam with a site on the surface of Earth."

"You're not supposed to be able to do that."

"Precisely."

"What's the target?"

"I haven't checked." There was a pause, then Mac said the target was a South American city I'd never heard of. I asked Mac to check for reasons anyone would pick that city, and he said that General Jorge Perez bases his army there.

"When is this supposed to happen?"

"The sequence is to be triggered when we acquire contact with the Brazilian antenna."

"Shut the powersat down, Mac. Route the beam around us and signal our status to Earth."

"I can't do that, Rusty. Telemetry with Earth and the other powersats has

been cut off. It is disguised to look like a radio malfunction.

"Isn't there any way you can shut us down?"

Mac thought for a moment, then said he could shut down the whole network by deliberately overloading some of his circuits. But that was no good. He figured it would take at least three days to repair him, and the network would be dead that long. More people would freeze or die in riots during the power outage than would be killed from a blast in South America.

"There is one alternative you might want to consider," Mac said. "If you disconnect or destroy the new component, monitors in the other powersats would detect a malfunction and route the beam around us. I would suggest you destroy the component before informing Una of your plans. There is no direct evidence to suggest she is responsible for the component, but circumstances suggest the possibility."

Una was methodically gathering up the tools. I couldn't imagine her planning something like this. Someone must have tricked her or switched the components without her knowledge. The whole plan would have worked if I hadn't programmed Mac for speech so he could tell me about it.

That reminded me. "Mac, have you ever deliberately lied to anyone before you decoyed me over here?"

"No. This new component offers me several new options in responding to data. I'd suggest you save the pieces after you destroy it."

"Sure," I said, leaving the laser and turning my suit radio back on.

"What's wrong?" Una asked.

"Nothing. False readings. Mac fixed it."

It's hard to see a smile through a faceplate, but I saw the one she flashed at me before she started toward the airlock. I watched her go, sure she didn't know about the component. I'd ask her about it as soon as I ripped it loose.

I was about to do just that when I happened to look up and see a five kilo wrench flying directly toward my faceplate. I tried to jump out of the way but the wrench struck my arm. The bone probably wouldn't have cracked if my long exposure to zero-g hadn't weakened it.

A second later she was on me, and as I struggled with her I knew I couldn't have beaten her even with two good arms. She was bigger and stronger than me. My only advantage was my zero-g experience, and it didn't seem to be doing me much good.

I saw a screwdriver in her fist and felt her hit me in the shoulder, puncturing my suit and sticking in my flesh. The sudden pain made me panic, and I kicked away from her as hard as I could.

We went sailing away from each other in opposite directions, spinning end over end. Slowed by the pain, I hesitated before I started braking. When I saw Una she was far away from me, but she'd be back at the powersat first. There was a tiny white plume of air flowing from the hole in my suit. I clamped my hand over it, but it still leaked badly. If I didn't get back to the airlock in a few minutes I'd die.

She had done it: I was as good as dead. All she had to do was keep me away from the airlock and the component until I suffocated. She didn't have any choice now that I knew about her plan. It made me angry. I hate politics, and I've hated all the hours of useless political debate my crazy American co-workers love so much. The idea of being a war casualty for a country I knew nothing about enraged me, but I was helpless to do anything about it.



I saw Mac's camera panning back and forth from me to Una. "Rusty?" he said. "Will you be able to destroy the component?"

"Hell, no! This crazy bitch is going to kill me!"

Mac said nothing else, but the whole satellite began to turn. The gyroscopes pivoted in their mountings and the beam swept toward Una. She threw her hands up in front of her face, a gesture as futile as trying to outrun the beam. Her suit turned to black ash, and a scream blasted out of my radio until the air rushed from her suit. There was a terrible second of burning, jerking transformation, then she was just an expanding cloud of gas. Nausea tugged at my stomach, but I kept my throat tightly closed because I knew I'd probably die if I threw up.

I ripped the component loose and went to the airlock. By the time I resurized the shack I was dizzy, but I couldn't tell if it was from lack of air or the pain in my arm and shoulder. As soon as my ears stopped buzzing I heard a voice on the radio, asking me over and over what had happened.

"And it was at that point that you contacted your supervisor?"

"Yes. You know what happened after that."

"Yes, we do." Simon turned the recorder off and began rewinding the tape. "The component is currently under study, as is your speech program," he said. "As you can imagine, we have to know what allowed Mac to kill Una. Some change might be necessary before we can turn control of the network over to him."

Simon stood up and led Rusty to the door. "As soon as we find out, I'll see to it that you are informed. You must be curious to know the role your re-programming played."

"No. No, I'm not," he said, and strode down the hall. ●

Bio-sketch

James Quinn

I'm 25, married, and I recently became the father of a beautiful baby girl. I work full-time as a newspaper reporter, and I work part-time as a freelance writer and photographer, and sometimes as an SF writer.

I found the idea for "A Special Kind of Loneliness" while researching a science article for another magazine. The story concerned a new NASA invention which can transmit usable electrical energy by laser beam, and I interviewed the scientist who developed the invention.

After he gave me the background information about his NASA contract, he told me about an idea he'd had about a huge

atmospheric laser which could be used as a source of clean, cheap, plentiful power, or as an ultimate weapon more destructive than the H-bomb yet as specific as a surgeon's knife.

The idea stayed with me, so I got out my calculator and drawing board and designed the system in my story. I would not be at all surprised if such a system is put into use someday. The theoretical evidence suggests it is practical, and the idea may be tested on an early Shuttle flight.



AMAZING FACTS

by Thomas A. Easton

FOCUS: --- Scent and Human Behavior

Scent is an important means of communication for many animals. The social insects—ants, bees, wasps, and termites—depend on it almost exclusively to organize group behavior. Mammals use it to mark territories, establish personal identity, and to signal aggression, fear, and sexual readiness. Humans may use it for similar purposes, although many people seem reluctant to consider the possibility—they equate “scent” and “stink” and seem to think humans are above such earthy matters.

Until recently, the evidence for human scent communication was only indirect. Biologists knew that humans have a number of structures seemingly designed for the efficient release of scents into the environment. These structures include tufts of hair in the armpits and groin and the human foreskin. With these structures are associated specific scents, sometimes quite strong, and biologists have assumed that before the invention of soap and deodorants, axillary, genital, and anal odors must have played a role in human life.

In the past few years, research has strengthened this assumption. One study revealed that human vaginal secretions vary in “agreeableness” according to the stage of the menstrual cycle at which they are collected; they are most agreeable just before and during ovulation, and men find

them more agreeable than women. Other studies have shown that there is some truth to the idea that women living together in close quarters—as in a college dormitory—synchronize their menstrual cycles; one researcher found that the underarm secretions of a female colleague could cause the cycles of other women to approach the colleague’s in timing. Still other studies show that there is a component in male human urine that can bring out aggression in mice (might it have a similar effect on other men?), and that human infants can identify their mother by scent alone (at just six weeks of age, they will orient toward and suck at a breast pad their mother has worn, but not toward a breast pad worn by another woman or soaked in cow’s milk).

The most intriguing research, however, deals with the effect of odors on attitudes. One researcher had students wear paper surgical masks soaked in either vaginal acids or “boar taint” (a component of male sweat) while assessing the leadership qualities of three men and three women. The scents in the masks did not seem to affect the male students, but the women exposed to the female scent preferred shy, retiring personalities, while the women exposed to the male scent preferred assertive personalities. The effect is subliminal, but definite, and it makes one wonder what advertising gimmicks there will be a hundred years from now. ■



THE MAN WHO COLLECTED BRIDGES

by JOHN KIMMEL



Illustrated by Steve Fabian

VISILIA IS not a planet.

This bold statement at the outset may only serve to irritate cartographers, but it is unquestionably true. The name of the planet is Gobi and Visilia is only an ancient city, an enigmatic ruin in which archaeologists like myself play discovery games. (Or rather, in my case at least, non-discovery games). Visilia had a brief flare of fame which went beyond our solar system when it was first found by the colonists of Gobi. A city built by non-human hands—or whatever—was universal news in those times of fresh spatial conquest. Consequently, for a short time Visilia was known to most worlds, and Gobi was lost in its glare. Such misinformation was common in those days of far-flung frontiers, and poor communications. It is doubtful whether much of the incorrect material which found its way into reference books and periodicals was ever revised. Part of the problem lay in the vast amount of new data that became available within a relatively short space of time, and the impossibility of accurate documentation and dissemination.

Scaplan, however, took no notice of my quiet insistence that he call my home planet by its given name. He would call everything he saw "Visilian."

"The Visilian climate can be very unpredictable, I'm told," he said.

I studied the striped effect over forces of the two moons and wished I were more of a meteorological expert.

"It must mean *something*," said Scaplan, shouldering his haversack. "Maybe it's rain?"

"Wishful thinking," I replied. We were by now well inside the vast desert and the heat was almost unbearable. During the long days we rested while the sun cracked the rocks with its white fingers and we travelled by night. Even so, when it was abroad, it hunted us down to our shallow hiding places, filling our lungs with its own burning breath.

"Anyway," I slapped clouds of grey, choking dust from my pack. "This looks like a wadi we're using as a path. It'd flood within an hour—maybe sooner. It's more than a half a kilometre to either bank. We'd have trouble making it."

"A kilometre's not far when it's cool."

"It won't be cool." This wasn't altogether true but I'd abandoned uncertain statements with Scaplan. He was swift to retaliate if I appeared to lack confidence.

"In that case it probably means it's going to be hotter tomorrow." He shifted his pack, presumably to a more comfortable position, and his small fat body quivered with the effort. The top of the pack towered over his damp bald head and there were stains on his shirt where he had sweated beneath the straps. Dark patches beneath his eyes glinted in the moonlight with small pinpricks of perspiration. He was not the ideal companion for such an expedition, but then I hadn't chosen him. It had been the other way around.

We had met at the Oasis of Leords on the edge of the Green Strip. He was advertising his destination on his pack. (EARTH-VISILIA read the patch!)

Scaplan had recognised in me another trekker, a kindred walker, and straightforwardly sat at my table outside the cafe. He had launched into conversation immediately, as if, because I was carrying a pack like himself, we were part of a brotherhood and he was entitled to instant friendship. My resistance to overbearing people is not strong and I allowed him to extract my destination. From that moment on I couldn't have prevented us from becoming travelling companions even had I the energy to do so. He would have stuck to me through hostility or tolerance. It was ironic that I had chosen to be a field archaeologist in order to escape people like Scaplan.

It transpired that Scaplan had no real interest in the evasive history of the

city, as I had, but belonged to a Bridge Group. I was only later to find out what that meant. Two nights out into the desert, for want of something to dispel the boredom, I asked him what his group did.

"We collect bridges," he answered simply, as if it was a common hobby. The tone implied that I should be envious.

"Fascinating," I replied, drily. "You collect bridges. Why not cathedrals?"

He gave a little laugh.

"Oh I know what you're thinking. You suppose we take pictures of them, or something like that? Not at all. We walk over them. Once we've crossed the bridge, it's ours so to speak. We cross it off our list. We've walked over Seventy thousand bridges—my particular group."

His tone dropped and an awed note entered into his voice.

"That's why I'm here. No group has ever done the so-called Visilian half-bridge."

The moons were bright that night and I tried to look into his eyes—those small white stones buried deep in the holes above his cheeks—to gauge the seriousness of his remark. All I could see was reverence.

"My group," he swallowed, probably to clear the dust. "My group saved a long time to send me here. It's a big responsibility. Have you any idea how much a round trip from Earth costs?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it's a lot of money. More than I could earn in a year. Anyway, we drew lots—five hundred of us,—and I was the lucky winner . . ."

I tried to imagine someone else winning that ticket.

"Do you have any young women in your club?"

"Group. Yes, several."

I sighed and rolled my sleeping blanket. Several menipadae scuttled from beneath and headed for the protection of the rocks.

Then he laughed.

"Oh, I see what you mean. Well, lucky for me—unlucky for you."

We set off, stumbling over the uneven terrain. Soon the rocks began to freeze and become slippery and I hunched inside my hooded jacket, knowing that within an hour or two my bones would ache with longing for the deadly heat of the day. Every now and again there was a crack like a rifle shot as the frost split another stone in two.

Mercifully we didn't speak very much while we were walking and I was spared Scaplan's descriptions of all his petty holdings. Not the least of which appeared to be his wife. I now knew that she had a mole on her left ankle, had visited Earth's moon three times with another woman friend and that her favorite dish was mushrooms. I was at present awaiting further promised details concerning the colors she was using to decorate their house on Earth. He had once during his disclosures given me a worried look when I inquired as to the style of her lovemaking, and had terminated the conversation rather abruptly. I had that listed among my few victories. Unfortunately, my weak character soon overruled my boredom and I atoned for my bad manners by asking him about his favorite subject: bridges. On that particular theme he talked well and held my interest. It was only then that the philosopher emerged from behind the creases in his compressed bulk.

"There is nothing quite as sensuous as the gentle curve of an arch," he said. "Not even the rounding of a woman's buttock." (Score one more for Scaplan. I had considered him incapable of the thought, unless instigated by me). "The arch bridge was introduced by the Romans—at least, on Earth it was—when they discovered pressure lines in stone shapes. Viaducts and aquaducts—I've crossed enough in my time. But take the single span arch bridge, sweeping out

over a stretch of water, like a solid, grey rainbow. Beautiful. Breathtaking sight, especially in mist with the morning sun striking the brickwork. I crossed one such in Scotland . . ."

"Why?"

He paused in mid-stride and gave me another of his worried looks.

"Why? Because bridges are made to be crossed. They're . . ." He seemed to search that oversized head for the words. "They're a mystery to solve. The mystery is in the falling to Earth. The unknown revealed, for only in crossing is there discovery. Bridges are constructed for Man, by Man, to pass over the impassable—the torrent, the gorge, the wide stretch of water . . ."

Not entirely true. There is always a second path to the far side, albeit a slower one. However, I didn't interrupt him—it might have robbed his face of light once again.

"Bridges can be simple structures, but at the same time magnetic. They can be rope bridges shrouded in jungle steam, or—do you know Earth at all?"

I shook my head. I was from a local planet, born and bred.

"Well on Earth they have these tall mountains joined by road bridges. The Himalaya bridge is one such—it is *magnificent!*"

The words were controlled reverence. God was not, after all, the human mold but a giant bridge: a stone-steel Samson.

"Then there are those ornate structures, preserved for us by the Bridge Society, that remind us of a more fanciful age. Solid cantilevers of wrought iron. And suspension bridges, cables taut as bowstrings—a masterful show of spiderwork . . . small wooden Japanese garden bridges—for ornamentation . . ."

Here I did interrupt.

"What about bridges that go nowhere?"

There was a short silence before he said, "Meaning what? I don't understand."

"Bridges that never fall to the ground," I said.

He gave his head a little flick.

"There are no such things. They would be useless objects—a bridge is functional or it isn't a bridge."

"I'm not so sure. Anyway, I have an idea of the function."

He chose not to listen. Instead he threw himself into an explanation of how all bridges, of whatever type, ascend and descend, or stretch an arm in some way across a natural hazard. His argument was full of flaws but I had no heart to tell him what was coming. He had, after all, a responsibility to his "group." Besides I had my own problems. When we reached the ruins of Visilia we had approximately a month to carry out our separate tasks before the season of High Winds hit the area. (As I write *hit* I know I have chosen the correct word. The winds come suddenly, from the West, and with days reach speeds of 300 to 400 kiloms per hour. A man is a rag in the path of such winds).

MANY NIGHTS later we were still walking.

"The causeway of Othman was over five miles long . . . but it never did reach the far bank."

Scaplan continued to chatter about the wonders of bridgeworld when the music of the city floated through the night airs and moved faintly around our ears.

"What's that?"

"Music," I replied, sardonically.

For the first time there was a trace of irritation in his tone.

"Yes, yes. I can hear . . . but who is it? Who's playing it?"

He was worried, I think, that someone had beaten him to the Visilian bridges. "It's the city. The place is honeycombed with windholes. It sounds pleasant now, but after a while it'll drive you mad."

"Oh, yes," he said absently, "you've been here before . . ."

We reached the next artesian well at midnight and rested above the deep, oil-dark waters for a short while. By dawn we would be in the baked streets of the ruined city and the enigma of the Visilian population would be my constant companion once again: a phantom which remained just out of my analytical reach.

The Visilian people's disappearance amounted to one more of those deeply-buried puzzles for which archaeologists such as myself, form a love-hate relationship. First I had to dig up the puzzle—then I had to unravel it. The more I became obsessed with finding an answer, the more possessive I became over the question: which of course was why I resented the intrusion of another man, even though he was a fool.

My current purpose in life was to discover who the Visilians were,—or possibly what they were—and why they disappeared without leaving writings, artifacts (apart from ruins) or any type of skeleton. It was as if, one day they simply gathered all their belongings together and went on a long march to another place. Only the incomplete shell, the city, remained. (Of course, this might be exactly what did happen but I needed some circumstantial evidence). The seven-and-a-half month year with its three months of high winds didn't help me any. Also the absence of supplies on a one man operation such as mine limited my time in the city. The reason for being poorly-equipped, poorly-supplied and poorly-aided was simply that I was poor.

" . . . and I've got a picture of a Visilian bridge," said Scaplan, as we huddled together under a makeshift shelter consisting of a reflector sheet belonging to the Earthman and some short poles we carried for the purpose. A depression had been necessary to fit us both in the shade. Scaplan's armpits, groin and feet smelled as though they were gangrenous. The air was foul and each breath torture on the lungs.

"Show it to me." I was interested.

"What for? You've seen one in the flesh . . . so to speak."

"Because I'd like to see it, that's why."

He fumbled around in a breast pocket and produced a sweat-soiled clipping. It wasn't a photograph—it was a computer-assisted sketch and an unrealistic one at that. The artist was obviously a romantic with a classical vision: a second or third hand description had produced the work, not a visit. It was a frontal view of the second bridge—I recognised the pillar ensignia—and it curved upwards and across the chasm, almost to the far side. The details, of the carvings, were good. But the perspective was all wrong and it was obviously not a graphical representation but a record of the centripetal artwork of the bridge. Windblown sand had pitted and worn those flourishes but the artist depicted them as they would have originally appeared.

"You're in for a shock, Scaplan. This isn't a true . . ." but he had fallen asleep while I had been studying the picture. I stuffed it in his tunic and settled down myself. There is a cruel streak to my nature which I seldom will admit to. I was glad I hadn't told him. I wanted to see his face when we got to the bridges.

WHEN WE arrived at the city I took the excited Scaplan to the first of the seven bridges and on seeing it his face registered various emotions, from incomprehension, to anger, to pain. The wailing of the windholes in the towers

reflected his innermost feelings and for the first time I felt a certain pity for the man.

"It doesn't reach the other side," he said finally.

I nodded. The footbridge was a single-span arch—or rather, half an arch—which swept out over the chasm like a flying buttress with no brickwork to support. It was ornate, the blocks curved out of metamorphic rock and pieced together using a type of mortar I hadn't yet been able to analyze. Either side of the bridge, two lattice-work spars curved out of the chasm walls, upward like white tusks, to support the main body. There was a handrail along the top which terminated in the points of the tusks and the lip of the bridge, where it ceased halfway across the wide abyss, sloped downward into the darkness of the quake and was smoothly finished. Clearly it was meant to halt *midway* across.

"Surely you knew? All of them resemble this one."

"The Visilian half-bridge," he murmured. "I thought it was a structural reference—like a bascule bridge, or a pontoon bridge. I mean—what's the *point* of such an engineering feat?"

It was difficult to keep the glee out of my voice.

"But you must have had a description—otherwise how did you know?"

His face was miserable. "The description we were given merely said there was no support from the far bank. We imagined a user merely swung himself down onto the other side—that it was maybe a few centimetres. The description wasn't that clear. 'A bridge like a horizontal waterfall' it said, 'sweeping out toward the unknown.' "

"The *unknown*. Surely . . ."

"A figure of speech. We thought . . . I *can't* disappoint them all now. I *can't*."

I left him there, staring down the sheer walls into the blackness below. At the bottom was hot lava. It was a fault rift, not a canyon caused by a river or a glaciation. It fell a long, long way towards the heart of the world.

LATER I began excavating. I had no set plan. Indiscriminate digging was as likely to produce results as well-defined trenching. Besides, I could never plan while time pressed at my back. The foundations and most of the wall areas had already been well gutted by previous better equipped expeditions. Only the windtowers and bridges, of hardrock, remained intact. There was almost no hope of finding anything—yet I was hopeful—especially at the start of a dig. Something kept pulling me back to those streets that were covered or uncovered, as the mood of the wind would have it. One day, one night, I would find the first Visilian artifact and become a rich man. Better still I would be able to make calculated guesses as to their shape, or size, or origin, or final resting place . . . or maybe all four, and more. Maybe . . .

The hot dust of the streets burned the tender insides of my nostrils and stung my eyes as I dug and sifted, and carefully brushed potential finds. Scaplan sat on the left side of the bridge staring moodily at its unusual configuration. Occasionally he shook his head and threw a pebble into the mantle's crack, probably listening for it to strike bottom.

Some time later I noticed he was still there. I had been working feverishly amongst the scattered stones, and finding nothing: resting when I was tired, and gnawing on strips of pressed protein when hungry.

"Aren't you going to eat?" I called.

His shoulders were slumped forward and it was only their slow pumping movement that told me he was alive at all.

I shrugged and carried on with my own task. Sometime later I saw him go for water, but he returned to the same spot afterwards. He had his own rations and I supposed he was using them.

After many days his continued unmoving presence on the edge of the chasm began to irritate me. I found myself being distracted by the morose hump of his back. His very immobility seemed designed to attract my attention. I'm afraid I shouted at him: berating him close to his ear and shaking my fist in his face.

"Why don't you go?" I yelled. "There's nothing for you here . . . wasting your time you stupid little man. I can't afford to worry about you. I've no time to be solicitous . . ."

He took no notice—didn't even look at me. He just kept staring at that bridge. I cursed him again, then left him, but my digging had lost its fervor. One of the reasons I continued with my futile seasonal visits was because I enjoyed the feverish excitement they generated within me. Shifting soil can be an engrossing occupation, even though the possibility of a find is negligible. Scaplan had robbed me of my enthusiasm. I continued to search but without hope, or any real interest.

The wind came early. The low wailing began to increase in pitch and this was my warning sign. I broke away from my diggings and prepared to leave, hoping I could return alone once the High Winds had gone.

Approaching Scaplan even my insensitive nose was offended but it was only personal hygiene, not decaying flesh.

"Are you coming?" I said. "It's dangerous to stay. Listen to those stone mouths—they're screaming at us to get the hell out and away."

He turned bright, feverish eyes on me.

"Listen, I think I've got it. Perhaps it's a trick of some kind, to keep Visilian enemies from attempting to cross. A drawbridge of sorts—only these people knew the secret of illusion. I mean the real secret. Maybe, from the other side they get an opposite picture. I'm convinced the *whole bridge is there—it just doesn't appear that way to us . . . A bridge always touches two sides.*"

"Why don't you try it then." I realized I was being cruel.

"I will." There was determination in his voice. "I've just got to get up my courage is all. Once I step out, there will be something solid beneath my feet. It's just a trick with the light. You'll see . . ."

He really meant it. I tried to show him that he was applying human logic to an alien concept. It couldn't work. He was bending his arguments towards the conclusion he needed: a common fault amongst narrow-minded people. Reject anything which diverges from a required answer. He ignored me.

Bending down, I picked up a rock, then stepped onto the bridge, hoping that time had not weakened the supports. Scaplan gave a sort of gasp as I walked towards the middle. I wondered if it was because it appeared that I was going all the way, and was about to rob him of his glory, or because he thought I might fall. Close to the centre the bridge sloped sharply downwards and was slippery. I gripped the rail and gently tossed the rock ahead of me. Significantly, it went over the end and dropped, uninterrupted, to the lava deep below. I walked back to Scaplan.

He turned moody eyes on me.

"Doesn't mean a thing," he said. "I've tried things like that. The Visilians weren't fools—they'd know an enemy would test such things and would build in safeguards. More illusions or something."

"What?" I shouted, angrily.

"I don't know. I'm not a Visilian."

The wind was growing in strength and I tried to pull him to his feet. He pushed me off, roughly.

"Damn you then," I replied, and set off quickly in the direction of the desert pale.

I looked back once, at his distant figure, still hunched over the abyss. The wind was howling around me like a savage dog, snatching at my clothes and tearing at the exposed areas of my skin with abrasive gritty teeth.

I hurried on.

Barely making it to shelter before the fury reached its climax, my situation had given me little time for feelings of guilt. However, once out of the oasis and inside the banyan building, I began to experience remorse at having left Scaplan to certain death. I informed the authorities of course and a rescue team reluctantly left the safety of the oasis in a heavy enclosed half-track to search for him. They returned some hours later empty-handed. The sand had thickened the air until visibility was virtually zero. It was a hopeless task to find the city, let alone Scaplan. Either he had choked to death on dust by now—or he had walked along his bridge and out into space. *A bridge always touches two sides.* I began drinking.

Scaplan's suburban logic wound its way through my brain as I integrated his arguments with my own opinions on the fate of the Visilians. Possibly he had been right, though I doubt he would recognize the answer. The disappearance of a nation can have many causes, both swift and slow. Plague, migration, war, pestilence, but one word stuck to my mind. *Religion.*

Just as an exercise in my own logic I considered the emergence of a new religion which promised a better deal from life than suffering hot dust and high winds. A suicide cult aligned with the promise of cool fountains and calm skies in the afterlife. A short walk to happiness.

Other arguments were as feasible: a migratory people that moved say, after each generation of young had been raised? That would give them time to build a solid city. The bridges could have been quays from which they, as winged creatures, perhaps, could launch themselves out onto the thermals created by the lava pools below.

Or maybe the bridges were sacrificial platforms? The tools and other artifacts mostly fashioned from materials that corroded, finally to become dust?

Possibly it was a disease and the bodies and belongings had been thrown into the chasm in order to halt an epidemic? A ceremonial garbage pit?

These were vague improbabilities, but the one I liked the best was the suicide cult. It fitted neatly with my picture of the Visilians as a 'damn you to hell, you bastard world' race. A perverse group of beings—as stubborn as Scaplan.

As I drank I pictured the figure of Scaplan waiting at the foot of the bridge—afraid to go on, yet equally as determined not to go back. A man trapped by his dilemma into doing nothing while the agents of his death increased in fury around him. The scene was printed indelibly on my mind, like the blue lines of the figures near the bridge on a willow patterned plate. I could never go back now, because he'd still be sitting, alongside that damned half-arch which had killed him—either directly or indirectly. I would not be able to work with those pebble eyes upon my back night and day: the gnome-like figure full of silent accusations as I scraped away at the soil.

How could I have saved him? I don't know—anything that suggests itself to me now seems impractical. I wish I had saved him. Not for his sake, but for mine. Scaplan could have killed himself a dozen times over and I wouldn't have

cared; but not at Visilia. At the time I was interested only in my own survival but I wish now I had concerned myself with him as well. Perhaps if I'd been more sympathetic in the begining when he learned about the bridge—or tried to take his mind off the problem in some way. Maybe if I'd attempted to interest him in my work, he might have climbed out of his depression. Instead he dug himself deeper until he couldn't pull himself out.

I wish I could have stopped him from committing suicide in my city. Now his mundane vulgarity mingles with my exotic lost aliens, walks their streets and moans through the windholes of their towers.

I can never go back. Scaplan has defiled my city, damn his soul to hell. ●





The DeCatting of Henry Jenkins

A Matter of Ceremony

by Sharon Lee



Illustrated by Karen Kuykendall

HANK JENKINS stood like a black-suited mannequin in the center of the circular Room of High Ceremonies, his cat draped, purring, around his neck. A yellow-robed official, his jeweled and leathered cat tall upon his shoulder, detached himself from the surrounding crowd and stepped close to Hank, glaring at his languid feline, "You could have had the decency to let the dressers attend him."

Hank's light blue eyes were innocent. "Well, I told that young fella they sent around that Sundance don't usually take to strangers; but he said he knew all 'bout cats. Pushy kinda fella, y'know? Well, I let 'im try it, 'course, since he was so set . . . Doc said his hands'll be fine, couple weeks." He reached over his shoulder, rubbed the orange-and-white's ears. The purr intensified and the official's cat twitched his ears forward. "I combed 'im, see? An' got all the burrs an' twigs out of his coat. He does like to bang around in the woods, though—"

Yellow Robe straightened abruptly, horror in his face. "In the woods." He shuddered and walked quickly away, leaving Hank and Sundance in undisputed possession of the floor. The shoulder-carried cat looked back once.

Hank sighed and shook his head. Nervous fella; lot of pressure in them Government jobs. His hand dropped from the cat's ears to join the other in the job of mangling his good black hat. Like a kid caught in the act, he muttered. Except he hadn't done anything wrong. Nothing at all, he repeated to himself firmly; but his hands twisted the rim of his hat into an impossible pretzel while Sundance purred into his ear like a happy dynamo.

Sure were a lot of people in the place. Hank wondered what the hold-up was. There was a long, low rubbed steel table to his right. The Judge would sit there, maybe. That was it, they were waiting for the Judge. That made sense. Hank reached up toward Sundance again, but pulled his hand back in mid-motion as the subdued muttering in the room abruptly stopped and three tall, robed figures, a cat riding tall on each right shoulder, filed in from his left in stately fashion across his field of vision and seated themselves together at the table.

Quiet enough to hear a spider weaving at 50 yards. Hank pivoted slowly to face the table, suddenly calm. Now here were people who knew what was what. They'd understand that he hadn't done anything wrong. He felt Sundance shift position smoothly and arrange himself, sitting high in imitation of the Judge's decked-out kitties, on Hank's right shoulder. The man squared his shoulders as best he might and they waited for the Judges to notice them.

The Judges—an old man, to Hank's far left; a younger man in the middle; and a woman of indeterminate age at the far right—sat with their faces forward, eyes closed. They looked like wax-work dolls, sitting there in their bright blue and orange and violet robes, with their cats so still, just like them. Hank wondered for a minute if they'd fallen asleep. Then, as though somebody pushed a switch, three sets of eyes opened at once and sweeping the faces of the silent crowd, came to rest on the stalwart man and his ragged-eared cat. The younger, orange-robed, man glanced down at the sheaf of papers he had pulled from his sleeve and began to read.

"We are here-gathered upon this day—the 24th in the month of September in the Year since we joined the Cat, 400—to perform the Ritual of Decatting, which has fallen to the lot of this man—," he paused and glanced at Hank and Sundance with a distaste Hank could see across the room,—"Henry Jenkins." The pause was longer this time, and Hank figured that now maybe was the time for him to explain. He took a step forward, "Well, yessir, that's me. An' this here, this is Sundance—"

He stopped at a slight shake of the woman's head, "You will be allowed speech in a short time, Henry Jenkins. Be still for the nonce."

Hank retreated his rash step, "Yes'm."

The orange-robed man dropped his glare once more to his papers. "The purpose of this Decatting is that said man Jenkins improperly acquired the Companionship of a cat of the House of Brunt, without knowledge of the special bond between the Chosen and their Companions or the uses to which that bond is properly—and legally—put. It is at the request of the House of Brunt, which is acting in concern for the dignity of their abducted Companion, that this Court has been convened for a full ritual Decattment. The man, Henry Jenkins, lacks the status to demand this ceremony in his own right, and should bear this in mind before he exercises his option to speak in his own behalf."

The silence spread, unnaturally, all around the room. Hank stayed as still as he could and watched the face of the woman Judge. She'd been neighborly to him once . . .

"You may speak now, if you so desire, Henry Jenkins." Hank barely caught the deadleaf rustle of the old, old man's voice.

"Yessir. Thank you, Judge." Hank approached the table until the outrage in the face of the younger man stopped him, and spoke to the old Judge and to the woman.

"I'm Hank—Henry—Jenkins, just like it says in the paper the boy read. And this is my cat, Sundance. That part's all right. What's puzzlin' to me is all the rest of that fol-de-rol about abductions and status and the House of Brunts—I never had any truck with the nobles, Judge. Like the fella says, I'm a farmer. I tend my farm and let the politics lie, 'slong as the taxes are reasonable and people don't mind pickin' their own apples, now that I got the arthritis. So, if the House of Brunt is bringin' me an' Sundance to Court, Judge, I don't know why. An' I'd like to, if you can explain it better'n the paper."

"How did Sundance come to be your cat, Henry Jenkins?" the woman Judge asked him.

Hank turned to face her. "Well'm. There's a stream—creek, really—runs through my property, down by the corn shed. Well, one morning I went out—early, 'cause it'd rained the night before an' sometimes the shed floods—an' was checkin' things out when I hear this little cryin' sound, down behind some reeds. So I went to check that out—figured it could be somebody's kid, y'know?—and there was this soggy and mad-lookin' little kitten kinda scrooched on this little raft kind of thing.

"Well, I couldn't just let 'im sit there, could I?" Hank was suddenly indignant, "I took the poor little thing home, dried 'im off and gave 'im some milk and he's been with me ever since. Four years that's been, ma'am. An' he's been a real comfort to me. We get along fine. An' if that paper says what it sounds like—that I stole Sundance—well, ma'am, that's just a plain lie."

"And how many other people of your acquaintance own cats, Henry Jenkins? And just to comfort them?" That was the boy in the orange robe. Somebody really oughta teach 'im some manners.

"Well, sir, nobody, except—there's Diplomat Jurie—she's the Agriculture Overseer for Milbrome—and she's got a cat. Never see one without the other, so I reckon the kitty comforts her some. She's gettin' up there, too, y'know. Must be nearly eighty."

Orange Robe waved his hand in impatience. "Diplomat Jurie is an honored member of the House of Axtan, one of the oldest in the Brotherhood. I would be amazed to learn that she was not Companioned." He leaned forward, speaking

loudly and with insulting clearness. "The question is, Henry Jenkins, how many people—common people,—farmers, like yourself—how many of *those* people are you acquainted with who enjoy the Companionship of a cat?"

Somebody really oughta teach that boy some respect. "Well, sir, like I said before, I don't know that anybody else *like me* has a cat. But, like you said, sir, I'm only a farmer. Could be there are things happenin' in the world that I don't know anythin' about."

A titter ran through the crowd at Hank's back and died. The woman Judge mastered the beginnings of a smile. The oldest Judge remained impassive, "Perhaps you and Xaltin should work more diligently at the art of patience, Roderick."

The boy glowered at the table top. His shoulder-kitty raised a dainty paw and licked at it with a careful tongue. "We shall endeavor to do so, sir."

The old Judge nodded gently. "Henry Jenkins."

"Sir?"

"Henry Jenkins, surely it cannot have escaped your attention that only a certain group of people have the honor and the responsibility of Companionship with a cat. You must know, sir, that only those of us who administer the workings of the multifaceted government, who have been adopted by one of the seven Great Houses—only these select people, Henry Jenkins, have need of the wisdom and council of a feline Companion. The lives of the common people are not complex nor—forgive me—ultimately important enough, to squander the Companionship of cats upon them.

"If your farm were burned this evening, Henry Jenkins, so that by tomorrow this time you were destitute, it would make no real difference in the ordering of the Empire or the lives of the people therein. If, on the other side, I were to misjudge a case involving the ethical holdings of a community, History would be altered. Therefore, my need is clear. Yours is unimportant."

The old man stopped speaking and closed his eyes. Hank stood, feeling Sundance like a stone on his shoulder, and was cold inside. The Judge didn't think he'd done anything wrong. But it didn't matter. They were going to take Sundance, anyway, without any more reason than ordinary people just didn't count against the Government . . .

"Henry Jenkins," it was the woman, speaking softly, "we are sorry. But there are too few Companions and our need for the newly-adopted of the Houses is great. You have had four years of comfort as a gift freely given from one of the Wise Ones. Be satisfied, Henry Jenkins. Be wise. There is work for Sundance now; and he knows his duty as well as any other."

Hank stood, silent and unconvinced. The woman sighed, reaching up to touch the leather-harnessed breast of her Companion.

"Listen to me, Henry Jenkins. To be Catted is the most solemn and beautiful ritual in a lifetime. To feel for the first time that mind link with yours, to hear sound through those ears, where before you heard only silence. Henry Jenkins, it is a way of life that you challenge. We who are honored with the Companionship of a cat do not take that honor lightly. There are heavy responsibilities, and much to learn. We are never again alone, Henry Jenkins, and we are never again only ourselves.

"You have not been through the full Ritual. You do not know—do not *really* know. If it should have befallen one of our number—this Decatting you so strongly resent—the human member would have chosen suicide. There is no other way for us, Henry Jenkins. Your very lack of position saves you, man

Jenkins. I bid you once more—be content.”

Hank kept his mouth shut. He reached one hand over his shoulder to touch a silky-furred foot. The woman sighed, and leaned back in her chair, waving her hand vaguely before her. Roderick Orange Robe straightened and announced, “Let the Ritual begin.”

From the crowd at Hank’s right marched the yellow-robed official who had spoken to him before the Judges’ entrance, flanked by two uniformed, but cat-less, men. They stopped directly in front of Hank and Sundance and the official recited, “By the authority vested in me by this gathering and the Wisdom learned through Companionship with Mrrabin, who sits upon my right shoulder, I hereby and for all time declare that you, man Henry Jenkins, are Decatted and alone. Therefore, hand over to me the cat you have called Sundance, whose name in the House of Brunt is Pertt, that he may be taken to the Place of Resting before he is given Choice of another Companion.”

Hank didn’t move. “He’ll come to you if he wants to, Mister.”

The official reddened, glanced back at the Judges’ table, received that gentle nod from the old Judge and a slight smile from the woman. “Very well, then.” And he reached out toward Sundance.

The crowd gasped as the cat leaned forward toward the approaching man and swung his paw—claws out—once, twice. Yellow robe jerked back with a yelp, left hand cupping his right, as one of the uniformed men leaned toward him with a linen handkerchief.

Hank grinned and reached up to rub the cat’s ears. Sundance ducked his head down beside Hank’s and purred.

The official, right hand wrapped in white, approached once more; the audience drew breath like one person and held it. Sundance leaned forward again, swiping at the encircling hands, claws battle-ready. The official’s cat leaned sharply to the left and swatted Sundance on the forehead, claws sheathed. The official stopped. Sundance and Mrrabin settled back upon their rightful shoulders. Hank felt Sundance’s tail beat a light tatoo on his back, then stop.

The official licked his lips and murmured to Hank, “Hand me the cat, sir; this is undignified.”

“The cat don’t like you, Mister. Whyn’t you go home and let us be?”

“That’s impossible. Don’t force the issue, Henry Jenkins, as you love your life. Turn the cat over to me now; no more nonsense.”

“Come an’ get ’im—if you think you can, that is.”

The official looked trapped. He glanced back at the Judges again, received no support that Hank could see, and reached out his hands again.

Mrrabin swatted—once, twice, three times—claws sheathed, at the white-wrapped hand. The official bit his lip on a sob. Sundance and Hank stayed absolutely still.

Yellow Robe bowed stiffly to Hank and Sundance, spun precisely upon his heel to face the three Judges. “I regret to inform the Court that it is beyond my skill to remove the Cat Pertt from Henry Jenkin’s shoulder, where he rides against all law and custom. Wise Mrrabin does not aid me in this, rather she, too, seems to believe that there is something amiss with this conduction of the Ceremony. I beg leave of the Court to retire.”

The woman Judge nodded, “You may.”

The three Judges sat as they had when they had first taken their seats, shoulders high and square, eyes closed in serene faces. Hank mopped his forehead with his jacket sleeve and wondered what was going to happen next. By

everything they'd said, they weren't going to let him and Sundance go home just 'cause the cat scratched one of their pretty boys. If they wanted the cat bad enough, there were ways, and not much old Hank could do to prevent it, either.

As before, all the eyes opened at once. Young Roderick cleared his throat. "It is the unanimous opinion of the Judges that the Ritual of Decattment must be followed in every particular. The dignity of the cats would seem to demand this. We have had no input from the three Wise Ones present; for the moment they choose to hold their own counsel. We therefore must proceed as we see best, in our purely human understanding.

"Man Jenkins, stand forward, please."

Hank moved forward one slow step at a time. Somewhere over his head Sundance was purring, loud and steady. They stopped two paces from the table. "Well, young fella, what d'ya have in mind this time? Like to pitch Sundance three to one?"

"The situation is far too grave for joking, Henry Jenkins. You do not seem to understand that the failure of Politician Lea to relieve you of the unauthorized Companionship of Cat Pertt has left us no choice but to demand that you end your life." The woman Judge looked as if she might cry.

Hank wouldn't believe it. "That's crazy, ma'am, if you'll pardon my sayin' so. I'm an old man, sure but I plan to go on livin' 'til Death wrestles me down to stay. I in no way intend to commit suicide, ma'am, and that's a fact. If you and this House of Brunt want Sundance, you're goin' to have to figure a way to get 'im. An' if you can't, then you'll just have to let us go home—fair's fair and if you people are outsmarted by a kitty-cat, then why don't you just admit it? I got cows to milk, ma'am, and crops to tend. I don't have much more time for games."

The woman nodded. And the old Judge shifted in his bright blue robes, "Fetch the Honorsword, Roderick, please."

The boy rose to obey—and three cats on three brightly-clad shoulders raised themselves into high arches, tails slashing air and jeweled whiskers quivering. Xaltin, claws deep in Roderick's orange shoulder, raised his head and screamed. Another scream echoed his and Hank saw the woman Judge rub her fingers hard against her temples, eyes closed in pain.

And through the crowd at Hank's back the words ran like brush fire, "The cats . . . The cats object . . . It's the cats, they don't want it done . . ."

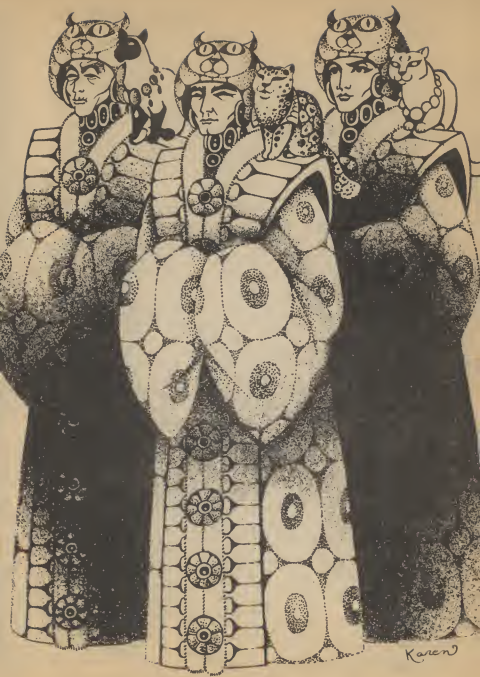
"Silence in the Hall!" the old Judge's voice rose almost to conversational level. The murmuring ceased. "Judges. Compose yourselves. Open your minds and speak with your Companions. There is something very wrong here. We have gravely erred. Fortunately, we are warned in time . . ."

Hank stood looking at the blank, closed faces before him, then twisted his head sidewise and up to look at Sundance, tall and calm on his shoulder. Well, it was worth a try. Sundance wanted to stay with him, didn't he? That meant they were friends, right? Companions, even, ceremony or no. Hank closed his eyes and tried to not think of anything. It was hard and he kept seeing flashes of color behind his eyelids. He was about ready to give it up when . . .

"Grreeting, man Jenkinss."

Hank started and swallowed, squeezed his eyes tight and thought hard, "Sundance?"

There was a sort of ripply sunshine sound that Hank somehow understood to be laughter and then something—no, someone—warm in his mind, friendly-like, not scary at all, and then—pictures . . .



Hank saw cats, lots of cats—ordinary cats, like Sundance, not dolled up and jeweleried cats like the ones the nobles favored—all marching out of the seven Great Houses and choosing their own Companions, working alongside people, equal to equal, sharing wisdom and learning, too. He saw the years run by with more and more kittens being born and choosing their Companions, freely. And he saw great machines being built that rose majestically, straight up through the sky and out of the world to land on other worlds, where men and cats learned to till those fields and build cities on that soil and then build more world-travelling machines to take more men and cats to other worlds . . .

Hank opened his eyes. The Judges were all standing behind their rubbed steel table, cats sitting high and calm on each right shoulder. The eldest Judge spoke in his deadleaf rustle that carried through the crowd easier than any shout. "We have conferred with the Wise Ones and bow to their vision. This day a new era has come to us and Henry Jenkins is the vanguard of that time. It will commence immediately that the seven Great Houses will open their doors to all who desire the Companionship of a cat, to let the cats that now reside in those Houses Choose for themselves who they may wish. And as kittens are born, they, also, will be granted this privilege and so on, until the whole world is Catted. And thus we will enter a new age."

The Judges bowed slightly to Hank and Sundance and filed out to the left.

The crowd turned upon itself and began to dissolve, here and there a voice already raised in jubilation, speculation.

Thoughtfully, Hank tried to tug his hat into some order, set the hopeless knot on his head with a shrug and a lopsided grin, and reached up to scratch Sundance on the chest. The cat purred loudly and shifted himself until he was draped around Hank's neck like a lady's stole. "Guess we'd better get on home, Sundance, how 'bout it?"

Sundance continued to purr. ●

Bio-sketch

Sharon Lee

Sharon Lee has been putting words on paper for roughly most of her life. She is Contributing Editor for the *Star Swarm News*; and winner of the First Annual Balticon Short Story Contest, in 1970. She recently left a jack-of-all-trades position at the University of Maryland at Baltimore to attend the First Annual Cape Hatteras Writing Workshop Seminar in Science

Fiction and Fantasy Prose for the Professional, where she was awarded a certificate for outstanding quality in her work. Since then, she has delivered tractor trailers and is presently masquerading as a legal secretary. "A Matter of Ceremony" is the first story she has placed in *Amazing*.

Sharon lives in Owing Mills, Maryland, with three cats, Archie, Arwen and Steve.

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What happened to her

by C.H. D'ALESSIO



Illustrated by Wayne R. Vogler

I WAS ABOUT to board an airplane, when two vigorous men broke through the column of passengers and deftly drew me aside. "Excuse me, sir, but are you Mr. Armond Fliesch?" one of them asked politely.

"What if I am?" I replied, jerking my elbow free from his finger and thumb. He produced a small wallet and flipped it open to show me a card and a badge.

"We are police," he said. "Detective-Inspector Lake wonders if you can assist us in an inquiry. He'll be grateful if you'll come with us to the station."

"Why should I? What inquiry? It's not at all convenient! You'll make me miss my plane."

"We are very sorry, sir, but we must insist. Of course we'll arrange a later flight for you, and provide transport back here in good time."

Well, I'm a fatalist. Why argue with the unavoidable? My only luggage was the grey hide case I carried. So I shrugged, and let them maneuver me expertly away from the oncoming tide of travellers, out of an unofficial exit, and into a police car driven by a third plainclothesman. They sat one on either side of me, and mutely stared out of the windows. We drove for perhaps fifteen minutes. Then, keeping disagreeably close to me, they ushered me up the steps of the police station, past a reception counter where an elderly sergeant stood telephoning, along a corridor, and into a cramped little room, whereupon they withdrew without uttering a word.

I observed it was a disgusting room, its window quite inadequate, its walls wrecked by a bilious buff paint. It contained a table, a steel filing cabinet, three hard upright chairs, a radiator, and not much else. At one end of the table a brisk young constable sat stiffly, prepared to operate a tape-recorder, and to write notes on a clipboard. Opposite me, behind the table squatted a short broad man resembling a collapsed bullfrog. He kept me waiting while he pretended to scan a page in a folder, doubtless to impress me as to who was master of this situation. Eventually he pushed the folder away, and took to quizzing me with a ponderous, gloomy expression.

Without invitation I sat down and relaxed, tilted my white velour hat to the very back of my head, balanced my left heel on my right knee, thrust my hands in my pockets.

"I am Detective-Inspector Lake," he announced presently, in a croaking voice. "I hope you can help me. You are Mr. Armond Fliesch?"

I tossed my passport across to him. "It's all in the book."

"Excuse me, ark, ark!" he said, trying to clear his throat. He snapped on an angle-lamp with a fierce beam and swivelled it so that it blazed at short range straight into my face. It had no effect on me, although the young constable outside the concentrated beam, flinched and blinked at such intensity of light.

"That's better! Ark!" commented the Inspector, coughing. From the shadows behind the lamp he went on sizing up my appearance.

I wondered if he envied me my thick club-cut red hair, for he was bald; my emerald-green silk shirt, for his was a dingy slate nylon; my diamond cuff links, for his cuffs were buttoned; my immaculate suit of charcoal sharkskin, for his was a crumpled lovat tweed; my god-like figure, for he was fat; my unlined face, for his was furrowed, lumpy, and sagging; my manhood in its prime, for he was old.

But of course his thoughts followed a different theme. He clicked over the pages of my passport, and glanced to and fro to compare me with the photograph.

"Ark ark ark," he coughed. "A regular globe-trotter, aren't you? Age twenty-nine . . . Height six foot . . . Hair red . . . Eyes . . . what? Yellow? I can't tell. Distinguishing features . . . Do you habitually wear those dark glasses?"

"Yes," I said, and smiled. "Did you bring me here simply to ask me that?"

"No, Mr. Fliesch. You were brought here because I've been ordered to make some inquiries in connection with a young lady. I'm hoping you can help me by answering a few questions."

Oh hell, I thought, and waited, deciding not to jump to any conclusions.

He reopened the folder, and again pretended to consult its sparse contents. The constable gauged it a proper moment to turn on the tape recorder and poise a pen over his clipboard.

"Armond Fliesch," said the inspector. "Yes, well, ark! Your address for the past ten days has been 58 Cardew Mansions, a service flat, for which you've paid a month's rent in advance. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely!"

"And your previous address?"

"I was in France."

"What part?"

"Paris."

"What address?"

"Oh, heck!" I protested. "What is all this about? I've been travelling around for years. Merely having ants in one's pants isn't a crime, is it?"

The Inspector gathered himself together, and became gloomier and heavier, as if the effort depressed him. Leaning towards me, he said weightily, "If you want to resume your travels with the minimum delay, you will please answer my questions without prevaricating."

I glanced at my watch. Another plane was due to take off in less than an hour.

"Dear man," I said, "I'm all yours."

The young constable shifted and rustled the page on his clipboard.

"Very well, then, let's have your address in Paris."

"If you must know, the Hotel des Cinque Freres."

"A most luxurious hotel, Mr. Fliesch. Cardew Mansions, likewise, are most luxurious flats. How are you able to meet such expenses?"

"I . . . have private means."

"Inherited?"

"No, not *inherited*, exactly. Given would be a bit nearer the mark."

"You mean somebody is keeping you?"

"I didn't say that. What right have you to dive into my personal affairs? The fact is, people simply give me money."

"Indeed, Mr. Fliesch? Why are people so generous to you?"

For a moment I extended my open palms to the ceiling, hoping this was an explanatory gesture.

"Women?" suggested the Inspector.

I smiled.

"Why do women give you money?"

"At your age," I hedged, "Do you really need me to tell you?"

"Answer my question, Mr. Fliesch."

How could I best explain it to him? I reflected, then said tentatively, "I sometimes wager with rather large stakes."

"Cards? Horses?"

"Neither. My bets are struck privately . . . with private individuals."

The Inspector gazed at me uncompromisingly and puffed out his cheeks. Deciding to approach his problem from another angle, he began to deal his words methodically to me in a series of rapid bass croaks.

"It seems that a young woman is missing from her home. Her parents have urged us to trace her immediately. A porter at Cardew Mansions has stated that she probably visited you last night. He saw her at approximately seven o'clock, waiting for the lift. When he looked again, she'd gone. He says he knew who she was, from recent photographs in the press. He'd seen her there before, once in your company, and he assumes she went up to your flat. Now, Mr. Fliesch, can you confirm his statement?"

Damnation, I thought. "What business is it," I demanded, "of his or of yours, who visits me at my private address?"

"Hasn't the message sunk in yet? Well, then, the missing girl is a very well-known young lady,—not only a beauty, but heiress to a colossal fortune. Diana Blakeley, barely seventeen years old. Just returned from a finishing school in Paris, to live with her parents in St. John's Wood. Yesterday she told her mother she was dining out with a female cousin, and would be home late. This morning it turned out she hadn't come home at all. Her mother, Lady Blakeley, telephoned the cousin. She declared she hadn't heard from Miss Blakeley for at least a week. Lady Blakeley promptly got in touch with us. You can't be too careful nowadays, can you, Mr. Fliesch? Miss Blakeley is a really promising candidate for kidnappings and huge ransoms. We've been checking various leads without success. Then their family butler suddenly remembered overhearing the young lady on the telephone yesterday, asking if that was Cardew Mansions. We thought it advisable to call there. We showed the porters the young lady's photograph, and one of them recognized her. We rang your bell and got no answer. We let ourselves in, and looked around. When we found none of your personal effects, our next move was to check several points of departure, including Rowheath Airport. That's how our plainclothesmen came to intercept you, in the nick of time, so to speak. Now that's about it, Mr. Fliesch. All we want to do is locate the young lady without delay. Oh, and perhaps it'll save time if you know that we picked up a face powder compact from under a towel in your bathroom. Platinum case with a ruby monogram. Lady Blakeley identified it as belonging to her daughter."

What a cramped, sordid room this is, I thought, with its hideous paint and its unhealthy lack of fresh air. So sweet Diana lied to me, swearing she'd told her mother she'd be away the whole weekend. I suppose she was testing my devotion. Annoying! If I'd doubted her, I'd have got the hell out of it at once, instead of waiting till today.

"You are quite right!" I said. "Chivalry and discretion to the winds! The young woman did visit me last night. She came of her own accord, to settle—can you guess?—a trifling wager."

The Inspector, who was developing a cold, surveyed me steadily over the handkerchief he used to trap a stupendous sneeze. Then the little room was silent but for the bronchial sound of his breathing, and a faint whirr from the

tape recorder.

"Your dreamy Inspector wants to hear more!" I grumbled, addressing the constable, who ignored me. "Good heavens, man, she wasn't with me for long. She must have left my flat before eight o'clock. If she didn't go home, I've no idea where she went. No idea, man. And now I'd like to be driven back to the airport, if it's all the same to you. You'll be exceeding your duty, won't you, if you detain me any longer."

I pushed back my chair, as if about to get to my feet. The Inspector held up a stubby, commanding forefinger.

"Not so fast, Mr. Fliesch! It'll take more than that to satisfy us. How long have you known Miss Blakeley?"

"How long? Six weeks or so. I . . . met her in Paris, and once or twice recently, here in London."

"Is your friendship warm enough for her to give you five thousand pounds?"

Here we go, I thought, resigning myself. "It could be, couldn't it?" I said.

"We have inquired at her bank," went on the Inspector. He appeared to be brightening up, and almost ogled me. "She drew out five thousand pounds yesterday afternoon. Was that to settle the trifling wager you mentioned?"

"Why should I lie to you?" I said, smiling.

"Trifling wager, Mr. Fliesch, even in these days?"

"To you, an underpaid servant of the people, it might not appear trifling," I suggested.

Crouching lower in his seat, pushing his lumpy face forward, he looked more and more like a frog.

"A young woman of seventeen, never before showing any interest in gambling or erratic conduct, suddenly cashes five thousand pounds and vanishes from home, after telling lies about her plans. Ark ark ark! Be so good, Mr. Fliesch, as to disclose the nature of that trifling wager."

What was I to tell him? My thoughts twisted in conflict as I berated myself for believing Diana, and simultaneously sought an explanation convincing enough to quench this tedious frog. The next moment, of course, the solution flashed into my mind. I was ready to laugh, but was careful to assume a serious manner.

"It's quite straightforward," I said. "She wanted me to remove my dark glasses."

"What?"

"My dark glasses," I repeated. "I always wear them unless I'm alone. She wanted me to take them off. To see what I look like without them, you know. Have you any idea how inquisitive birds can be? She went on and on begging and teasing me, until in self-defence I proposed a wager. I bet her she wouldn't like me without them. She bet me she'd love me just as much, even if I sported a double squint. All the money she could draw out of the bank, she said. And I said OK, if she was right I'd return her money to her. If I proved right, I'd keep the money. She was so sure she'd win, she was laughing while she tucked all the notes into my pockets. Then she suddenly grabbed my glasses. I grabbed them back. But . . ." I paused, trying to add a hint of suspense, "She lost her bet."

"Did she, now!" said the Inspector, puffing out his cheeks. "Who would have guessed it? Not I, for one! In fact, Mr. Fliesch, I don't believe you!"

"Please yourself," I said indifferently.

"And what happened next?" he asked, exchanging sarcastic glances with the constable.

"I put my glasses on again."

"Come, come, Mr. Fliesch, hurry up! What happened to the young lady? We simply want to know what's become of her."

"I told you," I began, but my voice petered out at the stupidity of it all. They both sat watching me with the expression of men about to close in.

Why should I endure this horrible little room? I wondered, and I sprang to my feet. The young constable also jumped up, meaning to dodge between me and the door. But I was there first, and I stood confronting the pair of them.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I've made many bets, but I am no gambler. Whenever I bet, it's always on the same certainty. Judge for yourselves!" And I took the dark glasses away from my eyes, my miraculous eyes.

My eyes have golden irises that absorb and store abnormal ranges of light and can see clearly in pitch darkness. In most humans, the pineal gland (situated inside the skull, and linked with supposed legends about a vestigial third eye, or an eye like the Cyclopes) remains dormant until adolescence, when it degenerates irrevocably. Not so with me, hurrah, hurrah! These unique grains of crystalline brain sand—the acervuli of my pineal gland—awoke, burgeoned, and structured themselves into their elected maturity. Since then I've carried a transformer about in the center of my head. And because I can't rely on always remembering to keep my so-called ordinary eyes seven-eighths shut, I shield them instead with dense carbon lenses. Otherwise light of any intensity is conducted straight to the transformer, and returns immediately, converted beyond control.

A likely yarn to spin the Inspector and his constable! So with the angle-lamp shining strongly in my face, I turned my golden eyes full upon them.

Instantly it struck, the soundless fire and fury, the fusion and fission of annihilation,—light amplified a hundred thousandfold, then narrowed thinner than a spider's thread, and beamed irresistibly on its pitiful targets.

Just like all the others, they vanished. Disintegrated without a trace. First the young constable, never knowing, then the older man, with no time to scream or throw himself down,—too late even for incredulity. Not a sound, not a sign, not a glimmer of evidence that they had ever existed.

Smiling, I settled my glasses back into place, switched the tape recorder to erase, removed the sheet of paper from the clipboard, retrieved my passport, and picked up my suitcase. With luck I could hail a taxi, and catch the next plane after all.

I peered outside the ugly, empty little room. There was no one about, so I closed the door behind me, darted along the corridor and slowed down as I turned the corner leading to the reception counter.

"Good-bye!" I said comfortably to the same elderly police sergeant, still on duty, and now typing some document.

"Goody-bye, sir," he responded, looking up and nodding at me.

I walked casually past him and out into the street. There was a vacant taxi dawdling a few yards away from me. ●



RAVEN

GETTING OUT IN TIME

by M. Chakoian

FRANKIE ROMERO was seventeen years old and is seventeen years old and always will be seventeen years old. That's what happens when you ride as fast as light in a '69 Mustang with a sixpack of Grain Belt beer and your girlfriend Julie. That's what happened to Frankie Romero, just the way he knew it would happen.

Frankie Romero had figured it out. He was bright. Very, very bright. Nobody knew how bright. Only his high school counselor, Miss Leggett, suspected. He had given her a hint.

Miss Leggett sat behind her cluttered desk in her tiny cluttered office in the Administration section of Galesburg High School and smiled a very pretty, professionally friendly smile at Frankie Romero. Miss Leggett was the kind of lady who could melt the heart of a seventeen-year-old boy with one of her smiles. She was six years older than Frankie Romero. She had a lovely face except that her nose was a little too large and her mascara was smeared today. Nobody was supposed to know that she was having an affair with Mr. Whiting, the biology teacher. Frankie figured she had been crying because of something to do with that.

"Frankie," said Miss Leggett, smelling of perfume and tears, and Frankie felt very, very sorry for her, "Frankie, you're going to be a senior next year. Have you thought about college at all yet?"

Frankie Romero stuffed his hands into the pockets of his blue jeans and leaned back hard over the top of the chair so that he was staring at the ceiling and his hair hung down behind him, shiny and black. "No. No, I haven't really thought about that. I'm not really interested, I guess."

Miss Leggett's mouth tightened into a little pout. "Why not? You're certainly intelligent enough. Frankie, do you have any idea how bright you are? Yes, of course you must know, how could you not know?" Frankie heard the soft swish of her nylons as she crossed her legs under the desk. "I don't understand why you've kept it hidden for so long. But your aptitude test shows—" She held up the computer-printed test results form with Frankie Romero's name on it and some numbers at the bottom. The rest of the form was a graph to show intelligence and aptitude in various categories of the human thought process. There was a horizontal line across the very top of Frankie Romero's graph.

Frankie mentally cursed himself for yielding to the silly temptation of the test. He had learned a long, long time ago that the only way to be left alone was to be as average as possible. If he totally ignored his school work, people got upset with him. If he got A's in everything, they made a big fuss over him. There was just no winning.

So Frankie Romero, a solid B-minus student, said, "Hey, look, I appreciate your wanting to help me and all, but I'm just basically not interested in going to college."

Miss Leggett put the test results form back into the file folder on her desk. "What are you interested in?" she asked.

Frankie shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Well, I really like working on my car."

Miss Leggett moistened her lips with her tongue and looked very earnest. "If it's mechanics that you find fulfilling, I could probably get you into M.I.T. That's Massachusetts Institute of—"

"I know what it is," said Frankie.

"You could study mechanical engineering." She paused for a response. None coming, she continued. "If money is a problem, there are scholarships. I know some people there. Frankie, what do you say?"

Frankie Romero took his hands out of his pockets and leaned forward and rested his tightly muscled brown arms on Miss Leggett's desk. He looked at Miss Leggett's soft face with her too-large nose and her smeared mascara. "Money isn't the problem," Frankie told her. "I'm just not interested in mechanical engineering, or Massachusetts, or college. I'm interested in my car, that's all." He stood up, indicating that for him, the conversation was over.

But not for Miss Leggett. "Just a minute, Frankie," she said, gently but firmly, and Frankie could not move. "Look, I don't really know who you are. I'm not sure I exactly even know *what* you are. But I do recognize that you're far too special to waste your life on just a car."

Frankie's eyes blazed. "It's not just a car," he snapped. He tossed his head, so that his hair flew free of his collar. "I've got to go now. Julie's waiting for me to take her home." He turned and walked through the doorway, seventeen years old.

Miss Leggett sighed behind him.

FRANKIE AND Julie flew past the cornfields of central Illinois that afternoon, that warm, spring Illinois afternoon, past field after field of little green cornstalks poking their way up through the brown Illinois dirt. The corn and the fields and the afternoon were a blur as Frankie coaxed and teased and loved every ounce of speed he could from the car; Julie sat beside him, her window down, her freckled arm resting on the window ledge, her red hair flapping and snapping in the wind, feeling the power of the machine and the tingle of the road beneath them as it unrolled from in front of them to behind them and everything was behind them, and in front of them was only more of the road.

"God," said Julie. "It's so nice today, Frankie. So nice to travel."

Frankie nodded. He did not dare take his eyes off the road. He calculated how far his car would travel in the second his eyes were off the road, and he did not dare look at Julie.

Julie reached over and tugged at Frankie's ear. "I love it," she said. "But hey, can't you make this thing go any faster? I think that was an old lady on a bicycle that just passed us, wasn't it?"

The road through the cornfields was flat and straight. Frankie urged a little more speed from his car. A little more speed and a little more speed.

Julie glanced over at the speedometer. "God, Frankie, what did you do to it?"

"I've been working on it," said Frankie. "A little."

Frankie's car was a dark blue '69 Mustang Mach 1. He worked weekends at Darrell's Garage and when he was not working on other people's cars, he worked on his own. All the money he earned from Darrell went into fixing up his car. It had a 429 in it, big radials on the wheels, a transmission he had fixed up

himself. Everything had to be the best, and everyone knew it was the fastest car in Galesburg County. Nothing could even come close to it.

The two lane highway turned as it approached the river. Frankie slowed the car, eased it through the curve, then swung hard across the highway and down a dirt road. Dust filled the air behind them.

The road cut through a grove of trees and then dipped sharply, ending in the thick grass of the riverbank. Frankie stopped the car and took a blanket out of the back. Julie got out and shut the door and grabbed the blanket from Frankie. She ran with it along the riverbank until he caught her.

After they had made love on the blanket between the car and the river, Julie lay close beside Frankie in the afternoon sun and asked, "Why do you love me?"

Frankie lay on his back with his eyes closed. "Because you have the soul of a poet."

"No, really," Julie insisted, drawing imaginery designs on his chest with her fingertip.

"Really," said Frankie, smiling. "You're in touch with the whole universe in a different way than I am. You're an artist of the spirit."

"You're full of crap," said Julie. She propped herself up on her elbows so she could look down into his face. "Do you love me more than your car?"

He opened his eyes in the shadow of her face and pecked at her mouth. "I don't know. How much does my car love you?"

She dropped down and bit him on the shoulder until he hollered. Then she asked, "More than you love your car, dummy. Do you love me more than you love your car?"

Frankie Romero gazed into her blue, blue eyes and saw in them not his own reflection at all, but reflections of clouds and angels and smokey corners of other places far away. "Do I love my hands more than my feet?" he asked. "You and me and the car, we're three parts of one living thing, the mind and the soul and the body. You and me and the car forever."

Julie lay back down next to him and cradled his head against her breast. "Not forever, Frankie." She kissed the top of his head. "I have something to tell you. I've made my decision about Antioch for the fall." He started to lift his head, but she held it to her body. "I wrote them that I'll be going."

"You can't go," Frankie told her. He heard the river, ten feet away, sloshing eternally downstream. "I still have another year of school here. You can't leave yet."

"We both knew this would happen sometime. It's your punishment for fooling around with an older woman. And mine for—"

"I'm not fooling," said Frankie. "It doesn't have to happen."

"It does."

"Stay."

"I can't."

This time he did pull away from her and knelt beside her and stared down at her. "You could stay one more year if you wanted to. You could stay forever. I'll be working full time at Darrell's this summer, and in another year I can take over the business from him. I could make enough money for us to live on. And every day after work we could drive out here and lie on a blanket by the river. Make love and drink beer and play your guitar. Hey, now," and he put his hands on her shoulders as she lay there on the blanket looking up at him, "what could be better than that?"

"God, Frankie, I love you," she told him. "But you can't stay seventeen forever. Not even you can do that."

The afternoon sun reflecting off the river made circles of light that danced on the surface of Frankie Romero's eyes. "If there's a way, I will," he said.

FRANKIE ROMERO loved the feel of drop-forged steel tools in his hand, wrenches and vice grips and screwdrivers. He loved the way the tools communicated his thoughts to the cars he worked on, making the cars run better and smoother and quieter and faster. Everybody said that Frankie had a magic touch with cars, and there did seem to be something magic in his fingertips and in his voice as he worked his wonders with the machines. But what they didn't know was that he could understand and remember and apply everything he had ever read about mechanics, fluid dynamics, lubricants, combustion, gearing, friction, electricity, and anything else to do with the modern automobile. He had read a great deal.

When it was time, always too early it seemed, to go home from Darrell's Garage, Frankie put his wrenches into his tool box and carefully wiped all the grease from his hands with solvent and clean rags. Then he put his tool box into the back of his car.

Darrell waved to him from behind the ancient wooden desk in the office, the desk covered with invoices and advertisements and the overflowing ash tray. "I don't know why you don't just leave them tools here," Darrell yelled, rubbing the bald spot that now covered most of his head.

"I like to have them with me in case I need them," Frankie hollered back. He patted the tool box affectionately.

"Hey," said Darrell, and waved for Frankie to come into the office of the run down old garage beside the moving river, the delapidated building that smelled of oil and gasoline and smoke and river water. When Frankie was obediently at the doorway, Darrell said, "Mrs. Haggerty called today to say what a good job you done on her car. Says it ain't never run that good before."

Frankie Romero beamed. "Timing was just off, I told you that." Darrell started to say something about it, but Frankie would not let him. "Hey, listen, I got to go, you know what Mama's like when I'm late for dinner." He slapped the top of Darrell's desk and hurried out to his car.

"Wait a minute," Darrell called, standing now, leaning against the front of the building. Darrell had been drinking again. Darrell had been drinking a lot lately, ever since his wife had died six months before from a long and very painful bout with cancer of the back and lymph nodes. Frankie Romero felt very sad when he thought about what was happening now to Darrell.

"Never mind," Darrell waved at last as Frankie looked at him from behind the steering wheel of his car, young and fresh and seventeen years old. "Go home and eat," Darrell said.

Frankie eased the car out of the parking lot and was home in almost no time at all.

TONY WAS not at dinner again that night.

Mrs. Romero cleared the roast beef and the mashed potatoes and the bowl of cold green beans from the dining room table. She paused as she squeezed behind Frankie's chair. "You sure you don't want any more, Frankie?"

Frankie Romero glanced over his shoulder and then patted his stomach.

"No, thanks, Ma, I'm full. Can I help you clear the dishes?"

"No, no," Mrs. Romero insisted. "You worked hard all day. Just relax. Your sister can help."

Angela's head was bowed over her plate so that her thick black hair hid her face from view. "Aw, Ma," came the lament from deep within the hair.

"Angela, get up and help your mother," Mr. Romero told her from across the table. "It won't kill you to do a little work around here once in a while."

"Tony never does nothing around here, I don't see why I should," Angela replied. She scooped the hair from alongside her face and glared at her father.

"Tony's sick," said Mr. Romero, and Angela knew from the way he said it that she had touched the wrong spot. She got up and removed the plates and the silverware, making as much clatter as she could.

Mr. Romero shook his head and unwrapped a cigar. He put the wrapper into a large glass ashtray which sat where his dinner plate had been. He took out his lighter and held the tip of the flame just below the end of the cigar, puffing until the smell of cooked beef was blanketed with pungent smoke. "So how was work today?" he asked his oldest son, his seventeen year old boy.

"Fine," Frankie replied.

"It's not too much, spending your whole Saturday?" He could not help thinking that Frankie was still a boy, should still be out playing baseball or building tree houses.

"No," said Frankie. "I enjoy it."

"Good." Mr. Romero rolled the cigar thoughtfully between his fingers, glanced into the kitchen where his wife, who still looked like a girl, and his daughter, who already looked like a woman, were side by side doing dishes. "Listen, Frankie, I want to talk to you about something."

Frankie edged his chair back slightly from the table. "Now, Pa? I'm supposed to be picking Julie up."

His father's face looked old and tired. "It's important. It won't take but a minute. I know you have to go."

Frankie nodded. "Is it Tony?"

Mr. Romero shook his head. "No, Tony will be all right eventually, God willing. Your sister Angela, I'm not so sure about."

Frankie's mind was in his car, fast down the road, Julie beside him, a cold can of beer in his hand, headlights cutting a tunnel through the thick midwestern night, a tunnel that closed behind them so that nobody could find them ever. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Angela turned on the radio in the kitchen. Rock music blasted out, and she shook and twitched to the monotonous beat as she rinsed soap from the dishes. Mr. Romero's voice was so low that Frankie had to strain to hear it.

"The kids she's hanging around with. They're no good for her, Frankie. I hear things, in the pharmacy, you know. I can't seem to get through to her. They should leave her alone."

Frankie Romero folded his arms across his chest. "So what do you want me to do, beat them up?" Through the relentless pounding of the drum from the kitchen radio he heard the seconds of his life ticking away, slowly, one by one. His father frowned.

"No, I don't want you to beat anybody up! Is that the way I taught you? You think that would solve anything?" He realized, too late, that Frankie had been joking. "No, I just want you to talk to her, Frankie. You're still her age. You're

still seventeen years old. I'm not. I'm hoping maybe you can get through to her. I can't, maybe you can. You have to try. Please. She's your sister." Mr. Romero's voice trailed off, and he looked afraid.

"Sure, Pa," said Frankie, rising from the table. "Sure, I'll try. Only I have to go right now, okay? It's getting late."

THE CLOCK on the wall behind Mr. Dobbs seemed to have stopped. The room was warm and humid, and Frankie Romero was not paying much attention to the physics lecture. He was thinking about the declining number of days, number of hours, number of minutes that he and Julie would have together before she would leave for college. The smell of bananas seemed to be coming from the chemistry lab next door.

"I'll be returning your exams to you at the end of class," Mr. Dobbs said. "Most of you did rather well, which is to say, passed."

Two more weeks of school, plus thirteen weeks of summer vacation. Fifteen times seven is a hundred and five days. Twenty-five hundred and twenty hours. A hundred and fifty-one thousand, two hundred minutes. Going, going, soon to be gone.

"And for the remainder of the semester," Mr. Dobbs said, "we will be discussing the theory of relativity." The entire room seemed to silently heave a sigh. "Of course, the mathematics of relativity can be quite complex, and I don't expect you to understand them. But it is fascinating to think about some of the implications of the formulas, and this is what we will be doing."

Mr. Dobbs took a handkerchief from his pocket and blotted perspiration from his round, smooth forehead. Out in the hallway, behind the milky glass of the door, a girl screamed, then laughed, joined by the laughter of a boy Frankie knew.

"Relativity is both liberating and confining, and that is what makes it so terribly, terribly important. Liberating," said Mr. Dobbs, "because it released for us the secrets of the atom, the greatest power known." Mr. Dobbs turned to the blackboard and wrote with machine-gun clatter, " $E = mc^2$ " in yellow chalk. "Confining," said Mr. Dobbs, "because it proves that matter, all matter, including you and I, are limited to speeds slower than the velocity of light."

Frankie Romero began to pay attention.

"Can anybody tell me what would happen to you if you began traveling at close to the speed of light?" Mr. Dobbs asked. "That's about three hundred thousand kilometers per second."

David Hathaway, sitting behind Frankie in the last row, called out, "You'd get a ticket?"

The class laughed and Frankie Romero laughed and even Mr. Dobbs actually smiled and wiped his face again with his handkerchief. Frankie glanced at the clock. It was moving after all.

"Well," said Mr. Dobbs, "you would get a ticket if there were a police officer who was fast enough to catch you to give you the ticket, which is doubtful. But what else? Anybody? All right, then, here are some things that Albert Einstein predicted, some things that we know are true because we've seen them happen with very fast subatomic particles." Again the staccato banging of chalk on the board.

"First of all, your mass would increase. So you don't want to travel almost as fast as light if you're on a diet, right, Linda?"

Linda Jacobs looked up from the note she was writing to Pamela Jean Cunningham about the things that Brian East wanted her to do but she wouldn't, and nodded her head.

Mr. Dobbs went on. "Also, your length would decrease along the direction of travel. Making it easier to get into a parking place, I suppose, if you didn't have to slow down to park." He looked around the room. Frankie had never seen Mr. Dobbs so animated, so excited about a subject. The whole class seemed to sense it. This was something worth listening to.

"And the most unusual thing of all, perhaps, is that time itself slows down. Understand," Mr. Dobbs hastened to add, "the person doing the traveling would notice nothing different. To him, everything would be normal. But to a stationary observer, the person traveling almost as fast as light would scarcely seem to age at all. A million years might go by here on earth, while the traveler was experiencing only a few weeks. In fact, at the speed of light itself, time would actually stop."

The room was completely silent. Mr. Dobbs smiled once more and mopped his head. "Of course, no one can go as fast as the speed of light."

Frankie Romero folded his spiral notebook shut. He was only seventeen years old. He did not know better. Quietly he said, "I bet I can."

Nobody laughed.

ON THE day that Julie graduated, Frankie Romero drove his car to Chicago to buy some books that he wanted. He spent most of the day searching through bookstores in the Loop and down at the University of Chicago. He stayed the night at his Uncle Vince's house in Chicago Heights. The next morning, he drove the hundred and fifty flat, uneventful miles back to Galesburg.

Although not yet ten o'clock, it was already hot and muggy when Frankie Romero pulled his car into the driveway. His parents, back from early Mass, were reading the newspaper and drinking coffee at the round metal umbrella table on the little cement block patio they had built out in back.

"Frankie, is that you?" his mother called when she heard him enter the house. "Come on out here and have a piece of coffee cake with us. Tell us about your trip."

Frankie Romero emerged from the back door, carrying something in his hand. "Thanks, I'm not hungry," he said. It was a tee shirt. "The trip was fine."

"How's your Uncle Vince? You behave yourself? What have you got there?" Frankie's father asked.

"Yeah, sure," replied Frankie. "He's fine. It's a present for Angela. Where is she?" He showed them the shirt with the Chicago Circle Campus emblem on the front.

Mr. and Mrs. Romero looked at each other uncomfortably. "She's spending the night at Roberta Peterson's," said Mr. Romero. Mrs. Romero nodded enthusiastically. "Frankie," his father continued, "did you ever have that little talk with her like you said you were going to? What did she say? Your mother and I are both concerned about her. Has she opened up to you at all?"

Frankie Romero picked up a piece of coffee cake, home-made coffee cake that his mother had learned how to bake from Grandma Girelli who had died two years ago in a nursing home in the middle of the night, took a bite of the coffee cake, and said, "Not yet. I will."

There was a moment of silence, which Frankie, eating the coffee cake,

thought might be a fleeting tribute to the memory of Grandma Girelli, or Angela, or Tony, or his parents, or to the whole world and everyone in it who was locked in the irreversible process of dying. He chewed the coffee cake thoughtfully and swallowed. Flies buzzed annoyingly over the table.

"So let's see the books you bought," his mother finally said.

"Sure," said Frankie. He fetched a large paper bag from the house and piled its contents on the table on the patio. Mrs. Romero seemed satisfied just to see that there were, indeed, books that her son had acquired in Chicago. Mr. Romero picked up each one and looked at the titles. "*Aspects of Relativity. Revised Nuclear Mechanics. Principles of Particle Accelerator Engineering. In The Days of the Dinosaurs?*" He raised his eyebrows.

"That one's for Tony," Frankie explained.

Mr. Romero nodded and looked through the rest of the books. "*Notes on Subnuclear Particulate Behavior. High Energy Physics. After Einstein: Speculation on Contemporary Propulsion Theory,*" he read. "Frankie, what on earth are you going to do with these?"

"Read them" said Frankie.

"I hope so," his father replied, closing the last book. "They must have cost you a fortune."

"I've been saving up for them," Frankie said.

Mrs. Romero reached across the table and patted Frankie's hand. In the morning sunlight Frankie noticed how slim and radiant and young she appeared, how smooth her face, how bright her dark eyes, just the way he always thought of them. But the sunlight also highlighted the few lone threads of gray in her hair. And her hand on his was rough and dry, her finger puffy around her wedding band. "We're going to see Tony in a little while," Mrs. Romero told Frankie. "Why don't you come with us?"

Frankie Romero shook his head. "I would, but I have to go to the garage. In fact," he stood up, "I should be getting there right away."

"On Sunday?" asked his father.

"You just got home," his mother persisted. "Besides, Tony—"

"No, I'm late already, I've got a lot of stuff to do there today." Frankie began stuffing the books back into the bag. "But I'll stop by and see Tony on the way. To give him his book. I'll tell him you'll be by later. Oh, and I'll be going out with Julie tonight, I guess, so don't hold supper for me. We'll probably grab a hamburger or something someplace." He kissed his mother on the cheek. "Bye, Ma. So long, Pa. See you later, okay?"

Then he carried the books into the house through the back door and out of the house through the front door and into his car and down to Darrell's, down by the river. It would be quiet at Darrell's on Sunday, and he could get some reading done.

On the way, he stopped and saw his brother Tony, who would be home again anyway after another week of tests.

THAT SUMMER, Frankie convinced Darrell to change the name of the garage from "Darrell's Garage" to "Quantum Mechanics." Frankie said it would give the place a more modern image. Darrell did not understand why a garage in a run down wooden building with peeling white paint along the lower river road at the edge of town needed a modern image. But he did not object.

He did not care. He was not around much that summer. Frankie Romero, at seventeen years old, pretty much ran the garage.

That summer, his sister Angela was arrested for shoplifting three packages of nylons from the Thriftmart store and was released to the custody of her parents.

That summer, his brother Tony was home from the hospital but did not seem to be getting any better. By the end of that summer, he was back in the hospital again.

That summer, Mrs. Romero complained almost daily about the ridiculous price of beef. It never rained that summer. Most of the corn died.

That summer, there were lines of cars to buy gasoline. The gas stations were closed on weekends. Frankie Romero was afraid that one day he would not be able to buy any more gas for his car. He worried about that sometimes that summer.

But mostly that summer, that summer of seventeen years, Frankie Romero worked on cars, other people's cars and his own car. Or he sat under a tree out on the riverbank behind the garage at noon time and ate a sandwich and read his books. Or picked up Julie and her guitar after work and bought a sixpack of Grain Belt beer and drove down roads that cut straight through fields of dying corn, and stopped in the fading sunlight by the river and held Julie as close to him as he could for as long as he could, and felt her slipping away. Like the summer was slipping away. Like the shallow muddy water slipping endlessly downstream until it merged and was lost forever in the great Mississippi.

Toward the end of the summer, Julie had to go to Antioch for a week of new-student orientation. She promised to return to Galesburg for six days. Then she would be off to school for good.

Orientation week, Frankie closed Quantum Mechanics. He spent the whole week there with the doors closed and locked, working on his car. His parents saw him only at breakfast and at dinner. Toward the end of the week, he did not return home at all, but slept in the garage, and bought his meals, when he remembered to eat, at the Dog and Suds down the road.

On Friday afternoon there was a knock at the door of the garage. "We're closed!" called Frankie Romero from inside.

Again the knock. This time Frankie opened the door, a welder's mask covering his face. "I said we're closed," he repeated from behind the mask.

Miss Leggett stood at the doorway, her yellow Volkswagen convertible sitting alone in the driveway. "Frankie?" she asked. "Frankie, is that you?"

As if to answer her, Frankie Romero took off the welder's mask.

"Oh my god," said Miss Leggett. "Look at you! What have you been doing to yourself?"

Frankie Romero was surprised to see Miss Leggett wearing blue jeans and a halter top. He had never pictured the counselor in anything but a knee-length skirt and white blouse with lace trim. Her shoulders were tanned a deep brown. Tiny bubbles of skin flaked off where the sun had burned her. She wore fashion sunglasses. Her nose was still too large for her face. She did not look like she had been crying. "Hello," said Frankie Romero. "We're closed."

Miss Leggett's mouth hung open but no words came out. She was staring at him. Frankie felt his face with his hand, felt the stubble of hair that covered his chin, felt the grease and dirt, brushed the long hair from his forehead. "How

long have you been here?" Miss Leggett asked.

Frankie Romero thought. He looked blankly at Miss Leggett. The bright afternoon sun hurt his eyes and made it hard to remember. How long had he been there? A long time. How long? What difference did it make, anyway? And who wanted to know? Who was she? Oh, yes, he remembered now. This was Miss Leggett, from his school. "I'm working on my car," he explained. "Julie's coming back Saturday. I have to finish. I'm closed now. Come back next week."

Miss Leggett reached up and touched her fingers against his forehead. "Do your parents know you're here?" she asked him.

Miss Leggett's hand on his face made him think of Julie. "I have to get back to work," he said. He pulled back and closed the door and locked the door. He stood by the door until he heard Miss Leggett stop calling his name, heard her get into her Volkswagen convertible and start it up and drive away. Then he finished making the changes.

After the call from Miss Leggett, Mrs. Romero found Darrell at the G & B Lounge and got the key from him and drove to the garage. She found Frankie on the floor. At first she was afraid he was dead at seventeen years old. He was only asleep. She made him come home. It didn't matter. He had done what he had to do.

FRANKIE ROMERO sat in his car in the parking lot of the Galesburg Greyhound Bus station and watched as Julie carried her suitcase and her guitar out of the dust-covered silver coach. Her mother hugged her, then her father took the suitcase and the guitar from her. Her mother put an arm around Julie. Julie paused, searching for Frankie, looking disappointed and confused.

When she saw him, sitting in his car in the parking lot, she broke free of her parents and ran to him, leaned in and hugged his head with her arms and kissed him through the rolled down window.

"I'll pick you up at seven," he told her.

"But—"

"Be ready. It's important," he said.

"All right," she replied. "I have a lot to tell you. I missed you," she added. "Did you miss me? God, it's good to see you again."

"Yeah," said Frankie Romero. "I've got a lot to tell you too." Then he reached behind her head and pulled her to him inside the car and kissed her again. She broke away and ran to her parents, turning once to hold up seven fingers to him, her face wrapped in comic urgency.

"Yeah," he repeated. "Yeah."

ANGELA AND her friend Roberta Peterson were sitting on the floor in the living room watching a cartoon show on television when Frankie Romero returned home from the bus station.

"Where are Ma and Pa?" asked Frankie, plopping down on the couch.

It was almost noon. Roberta had spent the night with Angela, and both girls were still in their nightgowns. They were laughing hysterically.

"They went to get groceries," Angela gasped through her giggling.

"Grow-ceries," added Roberta. "They make you grow. Get it?" Both girls doubled over with renewed laughter.

On the television screen a duck was using a large mallet to smash the paw of a cat. "Jesus, Angela, you're fifteen years old. You have to watch this garbage?"

asked Frankie Romero. He got up and turned off the set. On top of the television was a framed, black and white photograph of two young people on the day of their wedding. They looked very, very happy. They had just become Mr. and Mrs. Romero.

Roberta tried hard to talk. "I'm sixteen!" she finally managed to blurt.

"He's seventeen!" shrieked Angela, pointing toward Frankie. "Almost eighteen!" Both girls in convulsions now.

Frankie stared at them. He was angry that they were high, angry that they were laughing, angry with Angela, with Julie, with himself, with everything and everyone. And it wasn't funny. God damn it, it just wasn't funny. When the girls saw he was watching them, they both laughed harder. He picked up the morning paper off the coffee table and pretended to read the sports section.

Finally the laughter subsided as the girls, exhausted, lay on the floor with their hands on their aching stomachs and their knees pointed toward the ceiling.

"Hey, Frankie," said Angela. "Take us for a ride in your car."

"No," said Frankie Romero.

"Why not?" his sister asked. "Huh? Why not?"

Frankie Romero thumbed through the newspaper and did not answer. Each time he turned a page, he could catch a glimpse of the photograph on top of the television. He had seen it a million times. Still, he hardly recognized the people in it.

"Bet I can make him do it," said Roberta. She whispered something to Angela and Angela began to giggle.

Roberta got up on her knees and hiked her yellow nightgown up to her thighs so she could walk on her knees across the room, across the room to the couch where Frankie Romero sat and ignored her. Angela giggled some more.

When she got to the couch, Roberta put her head down on Frankie Romero's lap, her blond hair cascading down his legs. "Frankie," she cooed. She reached up and took his hand from the newspaper and drew it to her face and encircled a finger with her mouth, touching it with her teeth. Then she pulled the hand out of her mouth, down across her chin, "Frankie," down her long smooth neck, "take us," under the soft lip of her nightgown, "for a ride."

Frankie stared into Roberta's laughing, dancing eyes. Heard Angela choking with laughter. Tore his hand from the girl in the soft yellow nightgown, pushed her rudely away, stood up. "Jesus, it's not even noon yet," he raged at them.

Angela sniffed hard, trying to catch her breath. "Not even noon yet?" she mimicked. "My goodness, Roberta, it's not even noon yet. It seems like we've been here for days."

"Years," murmured Roberta, her head now resting comfortably on the brocade cushion of the couch.

"Decades!" cried Angela.

Frankie heard them still laughing as he slammed the door behind himself and headed toward his car.

FRANKIE ROMERO picked up a sixpack of Grain Belt, tried to keep it cold under the blanket in the back seat, drove around, drove around. At seven o'clock he pulled up in front of Julie's house. He got out of the car and rang the doorbell. Then he pounded on the door.

"Don't keep her out too late tonight, Frankie," Julie's mother said as Frankie

and Julie walked down the front walk, between the two halves of the perfectly manicured lawn, to Frankie's car at the curb.

"Yeah, we'll be back early," Frankie lied. He opened the door for Julie.

"What did you do to your car?" she asked, pausing halfway in and halfway out. "Was it like this this morning? The air scoop is bigger, and the tires are different. And the pipes! I've never seen pipes that big on a car. They look like jet engines."

"I'll tell you all about it," Frankie said, pleased that she had recognized some of the changes. He urged her into the car. "Come on, let's get going."

"And what's 'Tach 1'?" she asked. "It used to say 'Mach 1' on the side. Why did you change that?"

Frankie got in and appeared to start the car, but there was no sound. He shifted into first gear. She saw that the old gear shift knob had been replaced with what looked like a huge drop of crystal. It flashed and glowed with every color. The car glided silently along the street.

"What did you do to your gear shift?" she asked.

"You like it?" he replied. "It's new. I call it a Doppler shift." He laughed.

"All right, what's going on? What's 'Tach 1'? And why are you being so—" Her face darkened. "Frankie, are you planning on racing somebody tonight? You promised me no more racing."

"No," he said. He reached in the back under the blanket and pulled out two beers. He handed them to her. She opened one and gave it to him, opened the other for herself. "How was your trip?" he asked her.

"Fine," she said. "It's really a nice place. I think I'm going to really like it there." She looked carefully at his face, searching for clues. "You can come visit me, you know."

"No, I can't," he said. He slowed down for a stoplight. They both lowered their cans of beer to make them less visible. The light turned green and they were sailing again, out toward the edge of town, out toward the river road.

"Speed of light," said Frankie Romero. He took another gulp of beer.

"What about it?" Julie asked. She was getting frustrated. Getting tired of the game. She hadn't seen him in a week. Why did he have to act like this?

"'Mach 1' means the speed of sound," Frankie said.

"I know that," Julie told him. They sped past Quantum Mechanics.

"'Tach 1' means the speed of light. At least, that's what it means to me." They were shooting down the river road now, heading east, the sun at their backs, the dead dry skeleton cornstalks waving languidly to them from dusty fields as they flew past.

A hot wind whipped through the car. Julie's hair flapped like a plume of red smoke from the engine of a crashing plane. "Frankie, what have you done to your car?"

"It's tachyon powered. Time to close it up." He rolled up his window, pointed to her to do the same. "The scoop sucks in air, or free hydrogen, or whatever's available. The faster we go, the faster it comes in. Engine converts it all into tachyons, which blow out the pipes. Faster than light. And we go forward." He sipped the beer again. "We're going to reach light speed. You know what that means."

Frankie shifted gears and Julie felt her body melt into the padded bucket seat. The fields were a blur and the river was invisible and it felt as though they were not even touching the road anymore. "Nothing can go as fast as light,"

Julie insisted, fighting off her belief in him, knowing that he was telling her the truth. "It would require infinite energy."

Frankie Romero smiled. "Sideways. Where real and imaginary numbers meet. Then it's possible. Like slipping into the edge of a mirror between an object and its reflection." He laughed, and for the first time all day, he was relaxed and happy. "That's funny. I mean, here you are, talking physics, and I'm talking Zen. See? I told you we were part of the same entity." He patted the dash board. "All three of us."

Outside it was impossible to distinguish where they were, or to estimate how fast they were going. Julie could see nothing but a blue haze in front of them. Behind them, she could still make out the sun, which seemed to be turning a rich deep red as it set.

"Hey," said Frankie. "I got a new song for you to hear." He reached to the cassette player in the dash and turned it on. There was a slow, flat drag of music as the tape worked up to speed, and then the sound of a blues guitar and a harmonica.

"I'm a red giant, baby, I'm an exploding
ball of gas,
I'm a red giant, honey, a big exploding
ball of gas,
'Cause I like the way your space curves,
And I sure do like your mass . . ."

Julie, no longer afraid, laughed now too. "Where did you ever find that?"

Frankie Romero grinned, looked at her, grinned some more. He did not have to watch the road any more. There was no road to watch. "I knew you'd appreciate it."

Julie could see stars now, stars that seemed to surround them and reach toward them with fingers of light, curved crooked fingers. Behind them there was another star, a red star, brighter than the rest.

"I'm a relativist, baby, and I'm relatively
fond of you,
Yeah, I'm a relativist, honey, and relatively
speaking, I like you,
You know I got a big bang theory, mama,
And I want to prove for you it's true . . ."

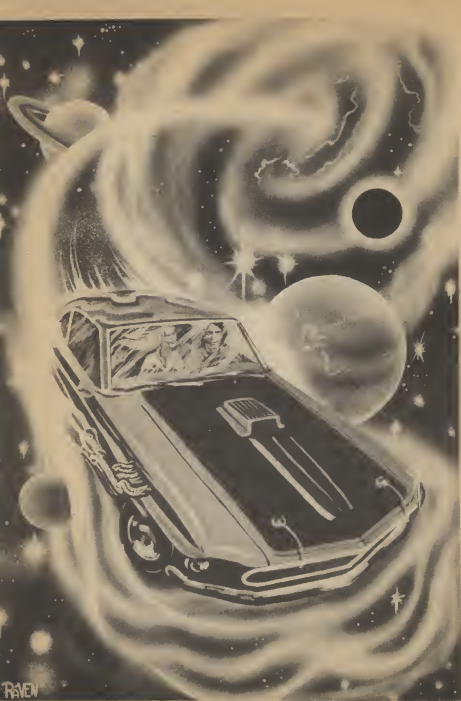
Frankie Romero put his arm around Julie and she snuggled up against him, her skin cold, her heart pounding. "I really love you, you know that?" Frankie Romero told her.

Julie looked up into his face. It was lighted by a dull pulsing glow that came from outside the car and inside the car and was part of the car and was part of them. She said, "I don't ever want to be away from you again. Not even for one second."

"You never will be," Frankie told her.

"I'm a pulsar, baby, and you know that is
no crime,
Well, I'm a pulsar for you honey, and I tell
you that's no crime,
I'm gonna disappear into some black hole,
Radiate energy and forget about time . . ."

Frankie Romero, seventeen years old then, and now, and always, reached



with his hand and held Julie's face up to his. A day, a year, a century passed.

"I love you, Julie," he said, and a million, a billion years went by.

A tear hung eternally on Julie's cheek.

Frankie Romero gave her a kiss that lasted forever. ●

Bio-sketch

Martin Chakoian

I live in Seattle, Washington. It rains all the time here. I have worked as a pizza truck driver, office services manager, and staff assistant to the previous mayor of Seattle.

I am divorced and have two sons.

This is my first published story. I am currently working on an allegorical novel about an intergalactic private eye who accidentally stumbles onto a planet of zen buddhists and mistakes their monastery

for a fast food take-out joint. Its working title is *Age Before Beauty/Pearls Before Swine: The Tao of a Cheeseburger and Fries To Go*.

I am secretly in love with a woman who lives in Evanston, Illinois.

I like to play chess, drink beer, and try to learn about physics.

Emotionally, I am seventeen years old.

I swear that the information above is as close to the truth as I am capable of telling.

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Illustrated by Elinor Mavor





OCTOBER BLOOD

by Gregory Fitz Gerald

Now You Have It,
Now You Don't

I N HER thirtieth year toward life Thera Mallory at last perceived that her cottage was made of gingerbread. Everyone else thought her cottage merely appeared to be made of pastry, the result of *avant garde* and innovative construction, of extraordinary new processes. Now and then Thera Mallory would eat a tiny piece of sill or shingle, just for confirmation—surreptitiously, of course, when no one else was about but her sons. For to Thera most people were blind to the truth, resentful of those who, like Moliere's misanthrope, Alceste, insisted upon it. Her sons, a collection of figurines made mostly by herself in frenzies of creativity, were models of cleanliness and obedience, almost never boisterous. Thera's wan flair for mythology and history revealed itself in these "sons," tiny representations of Sultan Schariah, Don Juan, Zeus with swan's wings, Priapus with broken phallus, Mark Anthony, a satyr, and Henry VIII of England. This brood, in compliance with their mistress' master plan, were never allowed to stray from their appointed places without severe chastisement.

Thera's umber New England cottage, with its sharply pointed gables, filigreed shutters, and red chimney, nestled among clusters of blue spruce, juniper, and maples leaved in October blood. Hard by a dense forest, the cottage reposed serenely on a neglected, seldom-traveled lane meandering, like an uncertain river, to pass beneath Route 128 in Massachusetts, a frantically bustling superhighway that filled the air with fumes and an incessant, rhythmic buzzing, as of giant, swarming insects.

The evening in late October had already begun when Thera Mallory marched the day's platoon of dirty dishes into their dishwater bivouac. Then she heard the knock on the front door. Drying hands on her apron, she lifted her sharply molded chin in a gesture of defiance, at once both attractive and irritating, that swirled her long dim hair about like a waltzer's gown. Quickly surveying her living room, she smiled with satisfaction. Every piece of early New England furniture, every antique mirror flanking the hallway, every obedient son stood erect in his rightful place. She flowed through the mirrored hallway, glancing to right and left at reflected youthfulness, unlined hands, hair with, as yet, no hint of gray. Pausing before the door, she drew fluttering hands over taut little breasts in an unconscious motion of self-congratulation then opened the door.

Illuminated in the ochre glare of the entry light stood a nightgown-clad figure wearing a cardboard face with jaundiced paper cheeks, over which trailed ebon wisps of false hair.

"Trick or treat!" shrilled Snow White through a dark mouth hole, brown eyes glittering behind the mask slits. With her star-tipped papier-mache' wand, wielded more as a truncheon, Snow White emphasized her demand again. "Trick or treat," thrusting at Thera a large paper grocery bag already heavy with indigestive loot.

Isolated from the rest of the world, Thera's sons hadn't discerned the advent of Halloween. Their mother had never given it a moment's thought and now, as she foraged in the refrigerator, was only slightly annoyed she had forgotten. Thera discovered a half dozen apples. The one she handed to Snow White was beautiful, so waxy white and rosy red that it made one's mouth water.

But Snow White's glittering eyes regarded the apple in Thera's hand disgustedly. "Oh," gasped the invisible mouth in a tone vaguely like Thera's own, "is that all you got? Ain't you got no candy?"

"I'm afraid that's all I have just now, my dear. You see, way out here, where so

few people ordinarily come, it was easy to forget all about Halloween."

"Then you don't have no kids of your own?" blurted out Snow White, shocked, backing through the open door. "My mommy told me to be careful of nutty people. No wonder all you got is some waxy old apple. But you just wait. When my big brother, Sean, gets here, you better give him something better than some old apple, or you'll see, you'll see, you'll see!"

This was too flagrant for Thera, who never permitted such liberties. She now stepped toward Snow White angrily, but too late; for the door slammed in Thera's face.

"Nasty, horrid child!" she said aloud, gazing deep into the hall mirror reflecting her image to its counterpart on the opposite wall then back again, over and over into infinity: a beautiful face repeated as often as anyone might wish. The only sound to obtrude itself into the room was the distant, muted sibilancy of the superhighway.

Thera knew that, because this must indeed be Halloween, other trick-or-treaters might soon appear at her door. So she prepared for them with her usual efficiency, dispatch and self-confidence. Outside it was already dark. Most stores would be closed, but even if they had not been, she had no automobile or other means of transportation. Improvisation was in order, so Thera marched out sugar, chocolate, and other ingredients. In a few minutes she was stirring a bubbling brown mass on the stove, wondering if she would have added arsenic to the brew had there been any in the house. This fascinating speculation occupied her until she suddenly remembered her favorite ice cream still in the freezer, realizing with satisfaction that it would probably last until the fudge had time to harden. Smilingly, as one who has just solved a tricky mathematical problem, Thera poured the heavy brown sludge into a hastily greased pan and pushed it, still hot, into the humming freezing compartment, then took out the ice cream.

"IT'S ALL sick green!" said the thirteen-year-old, staring down into the proffered bowl of ice cream. "Yukh! What is that stuff?" he asked, backing away from it. "You ain't trying to poison me, are ya? I heard all about you nutty people puttin' razor blades and worse in Halloween treats!"

"It's just pistachio ice cream," Thera said, cold as her offering. "It's wonderful—my favorite flavor. Try it, you'll like it," she thrust the melting green mound toward him.

"But I don't like pistachio," said the boy, having never tasted pistachio. "Ain't you got no CAN-dy?"

"Not quite yet. It's hardening in the pan now."

"Well, ain't you got nothin' else to put out? There's all kinds of treats," he leered at her. "They don't always have to be somethin' to eat, you know."

"You can come back later when the candy's hardened."

"Are you puttin' me on?" his voice had the same tone of querulous irritation that pervaded Thera's own. "I got a million other places to go tonight. Gimme somethin' now," and he held open a dirty laundry bag, revealing a potpourri of parti-colored candy wrappers, "or you'll be sorry, you'll be sorry, you'll be sorry."

Quick as a striking rattler, Thera seized his left ear between thumb and forefinger, squeezing and twisting. "That's too fresh."

"Ow . . . oh, owwww . . . !" he cried out, exaggerating his pain in an attempt to escape. "There," he pointed, trying to distract her, "what about that?" He

indicated a small, raggedy Andy among her collection. "How about that there?"

Thera's eyes followed the pointing finger. "All right," she said, releasing his ear, pleased that from bad taste he had chosen a mere manufactured birthday gift rather than one of her own sons. "Take it."

"You mean I can have it as a treat?"

"Take it, take it, take it."

"Say, you got a lot of these here puppets, ain't you. Yeah, look at this one!" He held up Priapus, "I like this one better," he said, exchanging it for the raggedy Andy.

"Put that back, you little . . . you little bastard!" Reaching in the umbrella stand, her hand emerged brandishing a purple umbrella, handle uppermost, like some murderous scepter, "That's MINE!"

"O.K., O.K., don't get so excited," he whined, replacing the tiny Priapus and discontentedly tossing the raggedy Andy into his bag instead. Thera lowered the purple umbrella, allowing him to scuttle watchfully past her. When he had reached the safety of the driveway he screamed back at her in a voice breaking from higher to lower pitch, "Think you're tough, don't ya', ya' old bitch? But I'll get even, I'll bring the whole world out here—see if I don't, see if I don't, see if I don't!"

Thera, shaking her umbrella furiously, like a war mace, strode out of the house after him. *He can't intimidate ME.*

Seeing her coming, the boy broke into a run. From the safety of the dark lane end he called back, "I bet your boy friend don't get much, don't get much, don't get much!" then disappeared into the darkness.

Thera stared into the darkness after the vanished boy. From far down the winding road, a single street light twinkled like a large and lowering star. A chilling night breeze swished through the red maple leaves, ripping and tearing them from their branches, until the denuded trees loomed even darker than the surrounding void. On the ground a brittle maple leaf, moved by the wind, scraped and scratched an erratic path through the silence. Thera, convulsed by an involuntary shudder, hurried back into her enclave of light and warmth. She sat down on the antique sofa and wept, cradling Zeus in her arms.

A FEW minutes later she noticed in her mirrors reflections of grotesque images lining her picture window, peering in. The faces, contorted and ghoulish in the dim light, sent involuntary shivers up Thera's back. She squeezed her raddled fingers together and threw back her head, allowing her lustrous black hair to swirl unheeded about her shoulders, then marched less confidently to the door.

Seven teen-agers in masks and full costume crowded the door-stoop. Without invitation they pressed into the cottage, following her into the kitchen, where she offered them the recently hardened fudge.

"We don't want no stinkin' fudge," said the shortest. "We heard you was puttin' out better than that!"

The faintly familiar ring of his tone—or was it something about the eyes?—troubled Thera. *He's only a child, she reasoned, and someone no doubt loves him, but . . .* and again the involuntary shudder racked her back and shoulders. "But what . . . ?" she asked him apprehensively.

"Them dolls over there."

She stared at him a moment, almost in disbelief. "Each of you can have a

phonograph record, or . . . yes, yes, take that bottle of whiskey." She turned back to her sons, "No, no NO! Don't touch them!" She grasped the umbrella again and raged at the tallest boy, who held up Don Juan in his hands. "Don't touch them!"

The boy looked at her a moment, as if undecided whether or not to heed her, then he turned and motioned for the others to follow him out of the house with their loot. The shortest, their spokesman, was last to leave. Leaning against the door, he said, "You just wait, you just wait!" He broke off a piece of shingle and began to chew on it.

When the last trick-or-treaters had disappeared into the darkened void, Thera hastily locked the doors and turned off every light. The resultant ripe darkness, like a protective black blanket, at first soothed and sheltered her. But, like the psyche, darkness spawns its own strange forms: sounds, crouching shapes, and movements—eerie, even menacing—all different from any under the sun. Familiar objects and sounds drowned in darkness dilate, bloat, like corpses long emerged in a black ocean. The sheer drapes she closed over the picture window made a moonlit silver screen on which shadows of maples and spruce performed gambades and arabesques in the night winds, like pavaning giants. The ancient Swiss clock on the mantel ticked more loudly than ever before. The refrigerator, still fighting the indigestive effects of hot fudge forced its icy innards, groaned, quivered, and palpitated wildly. Drops from the kitchen tap crashed rhythmically into the sink with the clangor of muted gongs. And upstairs . . . did something move across the floor? That clicking and scraping—was it only maple branch against window pane?

From her drawn curtains Thera saw—almost with relief—a sedan stopping on the darkened road, its lights, narrow and puny tunnels of yellow, less potent than the moon, only pricking the surrounding gloom. A dozen android teenagers spilled out chaotically and made separate, wraith-like ways across the lawn and driveway.

Over and over again the door chime tolled, accompanied by insistent knocking. But Thera, conquering her loneliness and terror, remained silent, reserved, hidden. Through the separating partition she overheard parts of their conversation.

" . . . sure it's the right place. Ain't it the only squirrely one around here? My kid sister says the old bag gave her some weirdo wax apple. Ma threw it in the garbage can."

"C'mon, let's blow. We're wastin' the best time for grabbin' loot. We can come back later."

"If that old witch's hidin' there in the dark, we could root her out."

"Later, later, later."

Milling about the dry grass, they leapt and cavorted in the light of the waxing moon, whirling in circling rushes, crouching, now coursing and swaying, in ballets of contorted shapes.

Suddenly the engine roared, and with a slamming of doors, a squealing of tires, the sedan careened up the winding road leaving a new silence punctuated by the old noises: the highway sounds, the dripping faucet, the spastic refrigerator, the old Swiss clock chiming the quarter hour, the unidentified sound upstairs . . .

That noise upstairs? It sounded like a stairway board that creaks, cries out when stepped on. Thera's composure began to ebb, and she waited there in the dark, trembling, unable—or unwilling—to cry out across years of restraint.

Hearing something scuttle closer through the dark, she edged silently nearer the front door, at last ready to break for the outside world. But a dark blur rushed past her, interposing itself. Still she did not scream, only clasped her hands, her fingers, like a nest of snakes, writhing frenetically among one another. She heard the heavy, labored breathing moving nearer in the dark and lunged for the light switch to illuminate the terror. But before she could reach it, she was lifted from her feet then hurled to the carpeted floor, with the strange form bent over her.

"Trick or treat?" he whispered with humorless laughter in an almost familiar voice.

Above her, silhouetted against the moonlit screen of the drapes, she saw the outline of his head and shoulders, at once strange and familiar, and the ears . . . my God, the ears! She screamed, and it sounded like the high-pitched screech of an astrojet warming up, or outraged train brakes on a runaway decline, continuing until all breath was gone. Then she was scratching, biting, fighting with waning strength, but uselessly, as piece by piece her clothes were peeled off. Finally, she lay squirming and naked on the floor with the intruder.

To save her strength she had to stop screaming; so they grappled silently on the carpet. He forced her hands behind her back and held her two thumbs together fast in his one large clenched palm, groping between her thighs with his other hand. Nearly helpless, she crossed her legs, locking them together as tightly as she could, determined to stop him. But he put his knee into the cleft of her crossed thighs, bearing down with all his weight and power, giving her such pain that she must give way to that terrible knee, followed at once by the second knee, and then, Oh, . . . wriggling and squirming wildly, she still fought, but he lay full on top of her. She bit into his hairy neck. At that instant his finger probed deeply, and surprisingly gently, into her and began to move over and among exactly those places where . . . where . . .

His scent, so gamey, rank, and musky, overwhelmed her and she stopped struggling, just moaned softly. And when he supplanted his finger, she shuddered uncontrollably, broke into tears, weeping, sobbing, with no fight left.

Then, when his motion had become hypnotically regular, he released her hands, and they, with terrified fingers, tried to push him from her weakened thighs. But at last, overwhelmed by the spell of his incessant motion, her arms crept slowly about his waist, and she began to move with him, oblivious to what should have been the painful prodding of his hip against her softer flesh, to the prickly hair on his chest, his sweaty hot smell, and the late October blood.

A mere half-mile away the late model automobiles whizzed over the great superhighway with their usual regularity. Huge trucks roaring louder as they approached, snarled away to mere angry muttering, to be supplanted by the lighter, more constant whoosh of the automobiles.

FOUR FEET from where Thera now lay alone, bloody, and exhausted, a fist-sized stone, having smashed through the picture window and momentarily parted the moon-drenched drapes, fell with a loud thud on the carpet.

"We know you're in there!" came a shrill voice from outside. "No treats, so you get tricked!"

She struggled to her feet, white skin glistening in the shaft of moonlight that had followed the stone to the carpet; moved dazedly to the telephone only to discover it had been torn from its wall mount. Then she opened the door. The

chill night wind blew past the young people clustered on the doorstep and flowed unnoticed over her bare skin.

"Hey, dig that crazy costume? Great!" said a tall young man emerging from the surrounding moon-blanchd darkness to snap on the hall switch.

"Help me! Please help me . . ."

"Trick or treat!" They pressed in on her, and she retreated into the house again, dazed by their incessant babble.

"Help me . . .!"

"You sure are a mess," said one older girl, taking a comb out of her purse and pulling it rhythmically through Thera's matted long dim hair. Then she led Thera to the kitchen and washed away all signs of blood.

"Thank you . . . but there's a man . . . he went upstairs . . ."

"Aw," interrupted a boy with a half-inch of down hanging on his chin like a billy goat's whiskers, "let the old boy hide upstairs if he wants to." He opened the refrigerator, and began passing out its contents to his companions saying, "You do your thing, and we'll do ours."

"But you don't understand. My telephone won't work. Please get the police."

"Me get the fuzz on Halloween? You gotta be crazy. Anyway, they're all hiding out tonight. What do you want the fuzz nosing around your private life for? When my old man gets a little next door, my old lady sure don't call the fuzz. She just puts on her best dress and lams down to Tony's bar."

A second car arrived in the driveway and disgorged its contents into the living room.

"Ain't you got no pot or acid?" asked a denimed newcomer of Thera, who merely stared straight ahead without hearing. "Well, then, we got to settle for this poison," he said, opening the cellarette and extracting a bottle of arak. Outside a third car, then a fourth drove up and parked in the lane, while inside a young woman with knee-long yellow hair put a stack of records on the stereo turntable and began solo dancing with the volume at maximum.

More cars arrived, spewing their contents into the cottage: young men and women who immediately began writhing and squirming in various dances, shouting to each other, one leading Thera, still naked and dazed, to dance among them. Her bewildered, shocked movements were hailed as a new form of expression, and they clapped and cheered her on.

A young man remarked, "What a swinger!" Immediately one lithe young thing, not to be outdone by such an ancient square, peeled off all her clothes. Unwilling to be thus upstaged, two girls imitated her, and soon the room was festooned with clothing of every description: underwear draped over the lamps, bras hanging from the chandelier, and bodies in various stages of nakedness danced sensually about the room. Several intertwined themselves on chairs, the sofa, twisting and thumping noisily about on the floor.

A voice, indistinguishable as to sex, emerged from the writhing, squirming throng of bodies, "Man, what a great groupie," while Thera stood among it all disbelievingly, legs apart, as if she'd never get them together again.

Thera's spent "guests" devoured the food in the refrigerator, drank all the beer and liquor—even the tequila, saki, and absinthe—rolled strange smelling cigarettes, shouted, laughed, cried, sang sad Israeli ballads, Calypso, and Ibo bush chants. One girl, who had been too reticent at first, straining to get her clothes off in time to retain the attention of her boyfriend (he was ogling and fondling a nearby nude) broke her festoon of beads. The beads rolled about on

the floor and a young dwarf who had taken a bet he could pick up every bead in his mouth, careened and crashed chaotically like a rampant bowling ball among the few dancers still remaining upright.

A young fellow with long sideburns, looking critically at a Modigliani nude on the wall, said to his girl friend, "She looks better than you do, Jean," and lifted the framed print from the wall and carried it to Thera. "No more treats?" he asked. Thera, at last understanding the question, shook her head. "Then I'll take this for my treat," he said, carrying it towards the front door, weaving through the naked dancers.

"Man, what a great idea! We got a right to lots more treats. I'll grab this stack of records." Another took a lamp, a chair; a girl bundled up the blender and the mix-master in her underclothes. A pimply-faced boy carried off the portable color television.

"C'mon, let's move the party over to my pad. Here, grab the other end." Two boys lifted the Fisher console stereo and carried it through the door with their clothes piled on top.

"Hey, let's cut out now! There ain't nothin' left anyway."

They got up from the floor and chairs, buttoning and zipping pants and blouses, hooking bras, hunting, grasping. They carried off tables, lamps, and even kidnapped all Thera's sons. As each left with loot, new faces appeared as replacements. The lane outside was crowded with cars, as if there were a great auction going on in the house. Now middle-aged and even older people began to arrive.

Thera, oblivious to the world around her, sat quietly on another sofa, hands clasped over her bare stomach, listening carefully for whatever might be taking root inside, while on Route 128 the cars and trucks roared by with undiminished regularity.

The milling crowds stripped the cottage as bare as Thera herself. A pair of newcomers lifted her to the carpet to carry off the sofa. Then moving her again to the floor, they rolled up the carpet and pad, chanting all the while, "Trick or treat, trick or treat, trick or treat." The latest arrivals brought furniture dollies, rollers, and moving frames. Soon they were carrying off the stove, refrigerator, and other heavy appliances. One of the newest arrivals broke off a piece of roof shingle and began to eat it.

"No," Thera breathed, almost unintelligibly. "Please no!"

At once other hands broke off pieces from the window frame and other parts of the cottage and, finding them delicious, began to gorge themselves with expressions of delight. Swarms of them covered the entire house, like locusts over a fecund field, tearing it to pieces bit by bit, devouring everything—roof, walls, and finally even the floor. At last not a trace remained of even the blood. It was all gone now, like drifting smoke in autumn wind.

DAZED AND shivering, Thera leaned against an aged maple, whose rough bark scraped insistently but unnoticed on her tender skin. A cool light breeze, presaging impending snow, played fitfully among those few brittle leaves of October blood still clinging to branches, leaves whose siblings rustled restlessly about on the hardening ground.

There, where her cottage once stood, lay a crumpled, empty potato chip bag,

five bent filter cigarette butts, a discarded tube of lipstick, and an intricate web of deep tire tracks in the earth—a reminder of no more, certainly, than what might be expected to be found in some recently abandoned lover's lane. Behind her the cars and trucks swished around the periphery of distant Boston. She sighed, moving her hands slowly up down over her naked, crossed, and goose-pimpled arms, intermittently hugging herself reassuringly. One long last look into the dark and deserted forest that had once edged her world, and she finally turned around.

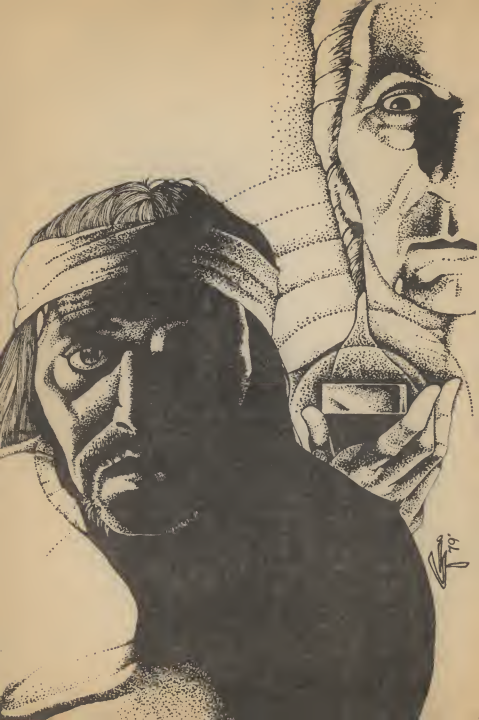
Once having turned, Thera strode rapidly and determinedly up the steep and rocky slope edging the highway, confident that before tonight's October blood could be buried by tomorrow's November snows someone would surely stop for a naked and attractive woman illuminated in the frontal glare of the new world's headlights. ●

Bio-sketch



Gregory Fitz Gerald

Gregory Fitz Gerald was reared and educated in the Boston/Cambridge, Massachusetts area. But his Ph.D. is from the University of Iowa, where he was a member of the workshops of Vance Bourjaily, Verlin Cassell, and Paul Engle. He has published more than 200 stories, poems, essays, reviews, and anthologies. He teaches creative writing, contemporary literature, Shakespeare, short story, and science fiction at the State University of New York, where he founded and is present director of the Brockport Writers Forum (which possesses the largest videotape archive in the world of interviews with writers). Among works in progress are the following: *OCTOBER BLOOD AND OTHER STORIES*, *CANAL SONGS*, *THE REEF AND OTHER PLAYS*, and the suspense novel, *HAD HE NOT RESEMBLED MY FATHER*.



TRUTH, JUSTICE and the ALIEN WAY

by Wayne Hopper

SURE, I might be in big trouble if anyone found out just how well I do my job, but I believe in *justice*. A couple of my old criminal law professors in Indianapolis would probably scream the loudest, yet they were the ones who lectured so insistently on assuming the innocence of a criminal defendant until he's proven guilty. Since I now *know* when the creep is guilty, thanks to Ramaz, how can anyone complain when the ends of justice are served? I merely do my job much better than other prosecutors.

I didn't seek out this job, though. Prosecutor openings are scarce, and all through law school I dismissed the idea of practicing criminal law. No amount of money could convince me to represent someone I know is guilty of a crime. Right is right, wrong is wrong, and wrong-doers should be severely punished. End of argument.

When Ben Taylor offered me a job as his part-time deputy, however, I took it. Ben has been Forbes County Prosecutor for twenty-three years, and his offer was an unexpected chance to do my bit for society. The job doesn't pay all that much, which is probably why he offered it to the newest attorney in Scottsboro. But the work has taken on a special meaning now that Ramaz has helped me solve the two biggest problems faced by a prosecutor: proving the defendant's guilt, and dealing with a marshmallow judge who slaps the crook's wrist and lets him go.

I remember the first time I saw Ramaz. It was one of those broiling 95-degree days Indiana is famous for in mid-July, although the heat wasn't penetrating the air-conditioned comfort of the new Forbes County Government Center. It was Wednesday, my day "in the hole". That is, I was scheduled to be in the office all day to talk to police officers and take citizen complaints.

I was still burning mad over a sentencing I had handled the day before. The judge had accepted the jury's finding of guilt in a first-degree burglary case and had sentenced the eighteen-year-old defendant to a lousy six months suspended sentence and—get this—monthly attendance for a year at transactional analysis counseling sessions. True, it was the first felony conviction for Ronnie McGuire, but he had a juvenile record an inch thick. Old Judge Carter has gone way overboard with his psychology books. Either that, or he's getting senile.

With that lenient sentence troubling my thoughts, I had dealt with three hours of non-stop citizen complaints that morning: assault and battery, criminal conversion, bad check, trespass, and one lady who wanted information about what she could do with her delinquent son. I patiently listened to their stories, advised them of whether there existed a supportable case, and in a few cases allowed them to sign charging affidavits. I was beginning to get a little tired

of the constant flow of problems when the secretary buzzed and then brought Ramaz back to my cubby-hole office.

"Have a seat, sir," I told him, indicating the three chairs in front of my desk. "I'll be with you in a moment."

As I completed and added my signature to the trespass affidavit signed by the previous complainant, I looked over the newcomer. Very dark-skinned, but with Caucasian facial features. Light brown hair, almost blond, which was quite striking against his dark complexion. Tall, thin, but not to the point of looking unhealthy. Incredibly long fingers, unadorned with jewelry.

Looks like a foreigner. Hope he can speak understandable English. I could tell the man's coloring was natural, not brought on by long hours in the sun.

"My name's Jim Whitcomb," I said as I completed the paperwork and drew a note pad before me. "I'm a deputy prosecutor here. What's your name, sir?"

"Ramaz," he replied, with the accent on the second syllable. "I require law enforcement." His English was flawless, each word spoken distinctly and somewhat slowly.

Hesitating over his name, I finally asked him how he spelled it, and I jotted it down hastily.

"And your first name, Mr. Ramaz?"

"I am Ramaz," he replied. "That is my complete designation."

I shrugged. Foreign people, foreign ways. "What's your address, Mr. Ramaz?" I keep complete notes on every complaint I take, even if criminal charges do not result.

"I have no place of abode upon this planet," he stated evenly.

Well, that shattered the mental picture I was painting of a visiting professor at the local college having trouble with a neighbor's dog. Hoping I had misunderstood him, I studied my note pad for a few moments as I considered appropriate replies.

"Uh. . . , I'm not sure I understand."

With the same calmness and just the hint of a smile that might indicate either a huge joke or the patient indulgence of a childish question, he replied, "By 'address' I assume you ask for the local coordinates, the geographical location, of a dwelling in which I reside upon this planet's surface. There is no such 'address' because my 'home' is located upon another planet revolving around a different star."

His brow furrowed slightly as he continued. "Surely one in a position of authority such as yourself has the requisite intelligence to understand what I am saying."

Oh, I understood well enough! I had had winos, bona fide schizophrenics and paranoids, and even a transvestite in my office before, but this character was the very first alien from outer space. *Why do the nuts always come in on my day in the office?* I considered the ways I could handle the situation. The trouble with working in a political office is that you must avoid stepping on toes if at all possible. How do you tactfully tell someone he's crazy?

Ramaz, prompted by my silence, said, "I perceive that you understand but do not believe. I am certain I can satisfy your doubts later if necessary. Can you not put aside your disbelief for a short time and listen to my narration? I have been wronged by a member of your species, and I feel that justice requires retribution by your society."

Something in his tone made me decide to play along, although I still believed I was dealing with a looney *extraordinaire*. "All right, Ramaz," I said, becoming

less formal, "give me the basic facts: what happened, when, where, and so forth."

"Thank you, Mr. Whitcomb. Yesterday evening, at 8:47 by your local method of time-keeping, I was in that portion of your city known by the designation 'Irondale.'"

"Just a second," I interrupted. "How did you happen to be there?" Irondale is one of the worst sections of Scottsboro, and nobody in his right mind would be caught there after dark.

"I was engaged," replied Ramaz, "in research in your city for the duration of the daylight hours yesterday. I had visited various areas of the city, for the most part merely observing and recording what I experienced, occasionally having direct conversation with members of your species. My allotted investigation time for this geographic/social location had nearly expired when I was accosted and then viciously attacked by one of your fellow-beings."

"Do you know the name of the person who attacked you?"

"Yes. The individual is a male, known by the designation 'Ronnie McGuire.'"

My interest skyrocketed. Nuts or not, Ramaz was talking about the young creep who had gotten off with a slap on the wrist the day before.

"What exactly did McGuire do?"

"As I stood upon the concrete walkway, he approached me and asked in a rather curt manner whether I possessed on my person any samples of your local currency. I informed him I had obtained representative examples of your varied and unusual money, whereupon he drew a sharp-bladed hand weapon and demanded that I transfer all the currency to his possession. I refused, of course, attempting to explain to him the importance of the money in our socio-technological evaluation of your world."

I broke in at that point. "And he cut you with his knife?"

A scowl clouded Ramaz's features as he answered, "Indeed, he certainly tried to injure me. He attempted to slash my left arm with his weapon, but my body-shield warded off the blow and induced a temporary paralysis in the motor reflexes of his central nervous system."

Smiling at the thought of McGuire frozen into immobility by a would-be victim, I urged him to continue.

"Knowing the paralysis would last for approximately ten of your minutes, I proceeded to a nearby communication booth and managed to make voice contact with a member of the law enforcement group you designate 'the police.' When I had relayed the basic details of what had happened, the officer declared that there was nothing that could be done by his department. He told me that all I could do was come to this office and talk to a prosecutor."

Fascinated by his imaginative story, I asked, "Did you tell the officer that McGuire was still there, paralyzed?"

"I did not have the opportunity before he directed me to come to you."

The entertaining story had developed a flaw. Practically every officer in the Scottsboro P.D. knew Ronnie McGuire and would go to great lengths to bust him. I knew a squad car at least would have been sent by to investigate.

"You did tell the officer McGuire's name, though," I said.

"No," came the calm answer, "I did not know the personal identity designation of the individual at that time."

That fit standard operating procedure for S.P.D. When they get a less serious complaint unlikely to lead to criminal charges for want of witnesses or assailant I.D., they usually refer the victim to us for detailed explanations of the

ins and outs of the criminal law, meaning we take the heat when nothing can be done.

"So how did you discover McGuire's name?" I asked.

"I returned to him before the paralysis wore off and transported him to our main research base—"

"Located in a spaceship in orbit around the earth," I broke in, catching the spirit of the tale.

"No, of course not," Ramaz said with a puzzled look. "Concealment and energy transfer would be much more difficult if we were to operate from other than the planet's surface. Once at the base I was able to scan the uppermost reaches of my attacker's mind to obtain basic information about him."

"What does your Ronnie McGuire look like?" I asked, thinking maybe I at last had the key to trip him up. He proceeded, however, to give an exact description of McGuire: short, slim build, long blond hair, thin and uneven moustache and goatee, dark circles under his eyes.

What is this guy's game? I asked myself. Still afraid to question him directly, I continued in my role of Mr. Prosecutor.

"Who else was around to see what happened when McGuire approached you? Did you get the names of any witnesses?"

He answered with a questioning note in his voice. "There were no other sentient beings within functional range of their sensory organs at the time of the incident. Why is that important? What significance does the presence of other individuals have upon the punishment of one who has committed a crime?"

At last. Although another chance to nail McGuire appealed to me, I now saw a way to get out of the conversation without having to take any action and without having to tell the poor old wacko to get lost.

"Well, Ramaz, I hate to tell you this," I began, "but I'm afraid you've wasted your time coming up here. If there are no witnesses to the incident it would do little good to file charges against McGuire. He would almost surely be found not guilty simply because his testimony would contradict yours."

"I do not understand."

"In a criminal trial, the defendant's guilt must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. After you told your story McGuire would just get on the stand and lie, denying or twisting everything you said. Without someone, a witness, to verify your version of what happened, or some other evidence to support your, the court would be unable to reconcile the different stories and would find McGuire not guilty. I'm sorry, and I hate to see a wrong such as this go unpunished, but that's the way the law works."

A refusal to file charges normally angers the complainant, especially if he's a little strange, and I expected Ramaz to storm out. His reaction was far from typical. He sat quietly for a few moments, looking calmly at a point a foot or so over my head. Then he smiled and said, somewhat ruefully, "Of course. In my outrage I overlooked the fact that your technology is not quite far enough advanced to have developed an instrument analogous to our truth-sayer. Perhaps, however, you would let me use my own machine. Tell me, Mr. Whitcomb, would my attacker be found guilty if he spoke the truth and his story matched my own?"

"Yes," I reluctantly agreed. "But I'd have to know for sure he would testify that way, and it just isn't possible. I can't have a warrant issued for his arrest without something more than just your guarantee of what he would say in

court."

"There is no need for issuance of an arrest order. The Ronnie McGuire individual is still within my custody and control. It was not logical to release him until I had talked to someone from this office. I can quite easily bring him here and demonstrate that he can be required to speak the truth."

Ignoring for the moment the constitutional objections to what he was suggesting, I pondered a reply. Ramaz had let his story carry him too far; he couldn't possibly produce what he promised. Instead of telling him so long and so sorry, I decided to play along, figuring it would be the last I'd see of him.

"Okay, Ramaz, let's see. Why don't you bring McGuire back here at about 4:30 this afternoon? The office will be closed and locked, but I'll be here working on a case. Just knock on the outside door." The office closed at 4:00 p.m., and I thought it best that no one else be around in case Ramaz did come back without his proof and cause a scene.

"Very good, Mr. Whitcomb. I will return promptly at your time of 4:30. Thank you."

He rose and shook my hand, nearly engulfing it in those long fingers of his. Then he strode from the office, and I was confident that was the end of it.

HE WAS punctual, but he didn't bother to knock. The clock-radio on my desk showed exactly 4:30 when I heard a movement in the waiting area outside my office and Ramaz stepped through the open door.

"Greetings, Mr. Whitcomb. I have returned and brought to you the individual who attempted to harm me." He turned and spoke to someone in the waiting area. "Walk into this office and sit in the chair nearest the wall."

It was Ronnie McGuire. He entered and seated himself as directed while I sat there open-mouthed. This was incredible! How could Ramaz get McGuire to play along with such an elaborate joke? The last place in the world Ronnie McGuire would want to be found was the County Prosecutor's office. Then something else occurred to me.

"How did you get in here? The main door should be locked."

"It is indeed locked," came the reply. "So as not to impose on you I merely transported myself and this individual from the corridor to a position outside your office."

"Excuse me," I said. This was getting to be too much. I stood and walked calmly to the main office door and checked it. It was locked, and I hadn't heard it open. For the first time I allowed myself to think that maybe Ramaz wasn't a nut after all. It scared me.

With my stomach in a knot, I returned. Ramaz had seated himself in the chair nearest the door and had placed two small objects on the seat between McGuire and himself.

"I am ready to proceed with this demonstration if you are, Mr. Whitcomb," he said, picking up one of the objects, both of which appeared to be small metal boxes the size of cigarette packs. Each had markings on one side, a dial and switch on the other.

"Just a minute," I said. "If all you have told me is true, why have you come to me? Aren't you afraid I'll tell everyone about you? That would interfere with your 'research' quite a lot, it seems to me."

Ramaz agreed. "Oh, yes indeed. Such attention would cause enormous problems for us. We possess enough advantages, however, to put us in control

of almost any situation involving direct contact with your species. Further, having analyzed the stigma often placed by your society upon those who tell fantastic stories, we feel safe that very few incidents of one-to-one contact will be reported and none will be verified."

"But you're willing to go into open court to testify about McGuire here," I protested.

"Mr. Whitcomb, I must offer you my apology. You are correct in your assumption that it would be difficult for me to enter your criminal justice system and tell the facts as I have explained them to you. Further study and consultation with my fellows just prior to my returning here has revealed that your system of law enforcement is unlike our own. My limited areas of research upon your planet have not included your criminal justice system, and a secondary motive in my coming to you in the first place was to gain such information. I apologize for any inconvenience, but the fact remains that this individual has wronged me."

He gestured to McGuire, who had been sitting there the entire time in his normal semi-slouch with a blank expression on his face. I had bought Ramaz's entire story by then, and I pointed to McGuire myself.

"What had you planned to do with him this afternoon?" I asked.

"Although it now appears unwise for me to participate in the proceeding you designate 'a trial,' I intended to demonstrate that he can be required to speak the truth in court, as it is done in proceedings upon my home world." He held up one of the objects from the chair. "With this machine operating upon him, he will be totally incapable of telling an untruth."

Ramaz picked up the other box from the chair and flicked a tiny switch on it. Awareness flooded into McGuire's eyes as he sat up straight and looked around at my office.

"Where am I?" he asked. "Hey, what's goin' on?" He looked wildly from me to Ramaz, who put down the second box and made a motion on the controls of the first. He held the box so one end of it pointed directly at McGuire.

"You may question him now, Mr. Whitcomb."

Well, why not? Even if the whole thing was some magnificent trick it was worth my cooperation just to see the outcome.

"Okay, McGuire, you remember me, don't you?"

"Yeah, you're Whitcomb, the prosecutor at my trial," he answered warily. "Hey, somebody better tell me what this is all about. How'd I get here anyway?"

"Just answer my questions. Do you recognize this man?" I asked, indicating Ramaz.

He looked at Ramaz, then back at me, and started to shake his head. The motion stopped as he said, "Yeah, he's the turkey I was just tryin' to—" His voice trailed off and a puzzled frown came over his features.

"I mean," he said, "him and me was over in 'Dale and I was takin' his br—" Again he stopped. "Hey, what is this crap? How'd we get here from 'Dale? I don't have to tell you nothin' without my lawyer."

Ramaz made another adjustment on the little box and said, "He is now compelled to answer any direct question."

I turned back to McGuire. "Did you attack this man and try to take money from him?"

He looked at me strangely and said, "Yeah, man. He had on good-lookin' threads and I figured—" He stopped and jumped to his feet. "I don't know



what's goin' on, but I ain't gonna stick around for no more of this."

McGuire tried to step past Ramaz to the door, but Ramaz had the other box in his hand, and a flick of the switch brought McGuire to a swaying standstill.

"Return to your seat," Ramaz commanded, and McGuire did so. Then Ramaz turned to me and said, "Mr. Whitcomb, you now believe that I have been telling you the truth about this individual, and I now understand that I am in no position to proceed through your system of law enforcement. Where exactly does that leave us?"

Dreaming of having that little box on the table in front of me in the courtroom, aimed toward the witness stand, I asked, "What would be the hearing procedure on your world, Ramaz, and what kind of sentence would our friend Ronnie receive?"

Ramaz and I talked for three eventful hours.

SOME MIGHT say Ramaz's box gives me an unfair advantage over the defendants in my criminal cases. While it's true I haven't lost a criminal trial since the day he gave me the machine, I don't see a thing wrong with using it. The box merely assures that the whole truth is told and justice is served, unless some bleeding-heart judge lets the guy off easy. In those cases I've discovered the usefulness of the other item I persuaded Ramaz to let me have, the thing he called a "sentencing rod". Just point it at someone, press the button, and poof! He's gone for whatever length of time is desired, off to some other dimension or time-line or something. I didn't exactly understand when Ramaz explained, except that the place is unpleasant but not deadly.

Ronnie McGuire will be popping up somewhere around town in another month or so.

It's sometimes difficult, though, to find a time and place to question the defendants alone. I know I'd get all sorts of Fourth and Fifth Amendment objections if anyone found out what I'm doing. But I've made a dent in the Scottsboro crime rate, and I've been wondering if there isn't a better, more direct way to use the tools Ramaz has given me.

I've been thinking about quitting this job and joining the local police force.

Bio-sketch

David W. Hopper

I'm thirty years old, married eight years to a wonderful woman, and the father of an adorable eighteen-month-old son who is worth far more than his weight in gold (and you know how much 25 pounds of gold is worth on today's market!).

After graduating from Purdue University in 1971 I taught English for four years in a local junior high school while obtaining an M.A. in education. I then escaped those 7th and 8th grade monsters (not all mon-

sters, actually; some were quite human) by going to law school.

I've recently opened my own law office and discovered it's pretty tough to start from scratch as a solo practitioner. I try to divide my time (there just isn't enough of it!) among my family, my law practice, church activities, reading, and (far too infrequently) writing.

"Truth, Justice, and the Alien Way" grew out of personal experiences when I

worked during my last year in law school as an intern in the local county prosecutor's office. Some mighty strange characters came into the office every now and then, but unfortunately none of them also brought the unexpected benefits which Ramaz provided in my story.

I've enjoyed a love affair with science fiction for about twenty years now, and I've wanted to be a writer since I was in high school. Thanks again for helping me a few steps along the way toward that goal with my first science fiction sale.

MEDIEVAL TALE

You may have heard the story
of the iron head built by Roger Bacon,
which, through the power of the Devil,
possessed the ability to speak.

"Time is!" it said.

"Time was!" (later)

"Time is past!" (finally)

It then shattered and remained forever silent.

Often have I feared
that I would wake up one morning
and find the head on my nightstand.

"Life was!" it will boom,

"Your time is done, opportunities slipped away."

And I shall burst into a thousand pieces.

-Darrell Schweitzer



RETURN TO MARS

The Way it Was

by Paul Dellinger

UNCLE FRED!" I yelled, my voice echoing within my suit's helmet. "Uncle Fred, let me in!" I couldn't see him inside the dull gray sphere that enclosed my starhopper's control center, but I could picture his mischievous grin when his reply filtered through my radio. "Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin, Johnny, my boy. But please be patient. This won't require much more time."

Be patient! Here I was, floating in the cytoplasm of a star-hopping leviathan we'd managed to control but could never understand, locked out of the only safe place in its abdomen or whatever you called the innards of these things, while Uncle Fred tinkered with the sensitive computer inputs it had taken me years to master so I wouldn't end up stranded light years from Earth—and he wanted me to be patient. He'd flipped. That was the only explanation. And it was probably my fault.

While it was never officially condoned, I knew other starhopper controllers had taken passengers on occasional scouting jumps like this one—girl friends they wanted to impress, or some space travel enthusiast who didn't have what it took to get through controller training but still wanted to see other worlds and would pay handsomely for the privilege—but I should have realized Uncle Fred's age might make the unsettling experience of a jump too much for him. Or maybe senility had started setting in even before, and I hadn't noticed. Uncle Fred always had been eccentric.

Now that I thought of it—and it seemed suddenly strange that I never had before—I wondered how old he was. He'd hardly changed physically from my childhood days when I first met him.

I grew up thinking everyone should have an "Uncle Fred"—someone to confide boyish concerns that parents might laugh at, or the anxieties of young manhood that would bring taunts even from peers who shared them. Uncle Fred—he wasn't really my uncle but it seemed I'd always thought of him that way—had been all of those things to me, and more. It had been his support, verbal as well as financial, that pushed me through the training necessary to man a starhopper. When you came right down to it, I owed him for everything I was.

It wouldn't be easy to kill him.

Oh, no doubt they would assure me back home I'd acted properly. After all, I had to bring back my hopper—and incidentally myself—so it could continue being used to locate other worlds for our burgeoning population. Our old planet had only so much room, even with its deserts and polar reaches reclaimed. Our chance discovery of the life-forms we called starhoppers growing on Deimos, the smaller moon of Mars, came providentially as things turned out even if we did come close to dooming our home planet by landing some of them there. Only the decision by the crew of the first ship to destroy their returning spacecraft saved us, we learned later. Now we limited our starhoppers to the lunar research centers where, if they got out of control, we'd lose only the moon.

Unfortunately, even the largest hoppers could carry only a few hundred passengers at a time so we never stayed that far ahead of our population growth. Someday they would grow them bigger, and be able to fit ever-larger human habitations into their gullets—like the control center in this one, where I should be now.

I wondered if the monitors in that center had recorded any habitable planets in this system. I hadn't even checked before Uncle Fred caught me with that sneak slumbergun of his. When I woke up, I was inside a protective suit and stuck out here . . .

And then it hit me. He must have planned this before we'd even left Earth to rendezvous with my hopper in lunar orbit, to have brought that knockout needler along. The unsettling experience of the jump inside of the living leviathan hadn't flipped him out, after all.

All right, so it was well planned. But Uncle Fred's planning hadn't taken into account that I could still stop him, dead—quite literally. In fact, that was the only way.

On the other hand, if there was the slightest crack in the non-organic outer lining of my suit, I would be the one stopped dead—absorbed into the living cells of this starhopping creature in which we rode.

The laser tool on my suit belt would exhaust itself before it could bore into the control center implanted in the starhopper, but it would burn through the epidermal wall of the creature itself with relative ease. I planted the boots of my suit against the curving surface of the control sphere and pushed off. I began talking again, hoping to keep Uncle Fred from completing what he was doing and also to keep him from speculating about what I was doing.

"Uncle Fred, are you still listening? At least you could tell me what you're trying to do. Maybe I could help—"

"Please don't upset yourself, my boy," he replied with an infuriating tone of reassurance that implied I was the one who needed to be reasoned with. "Thanks to your good instruction, I understand the procedure sufficiently to do what is necessary."

"My instruction? You mean that playing around we were doing? But we were talking about how to end up orbiting Mars, not Earth."

"Precisely, my boy. Mars, at last . . ."

"Omigod!"

"Eh? I beg your pardon, Johnny?"

I concentrated on steadying my laser beam against the inner flesh, if you could call it that, of the hopper. That was the only way I could keep myself from screaming in sheer frustration. Uncle Fred had had a thing about Mars ever since I'd met him, on a learning assignment for extra history credit. He worked in one of those living museum cities, reconstructed so people of our age could actually see and experience lifestyles of earlier ages. His particular position was as a librarian, and it was to him I went to learn how information was once limited to books. It was hard to conceive of a time when everyone didn't have instant access to all written works, through home video terminals hooked into world-wide data banks.

Uncle Fred, as I would come to think of him, really looked his part with his old-fashioned spectacles and baldness. When I knew him better, I once asked why he didn't wear contacts or have a hair transplant. He joked that he was a long-lived Martian who'd made a one-way exploratory voyage to Earth ages ago, and his eyes and scalp couldn't handle those things. They would just have to wait until we developed suitable hardware to take him home again.

I'd laughed with him because, even then, we'd long since bypassed Mars and the other unreceptive planets of our system in our rush to the stars since the discovery of the starhoppers in Deimos. All at once, it wasn't funny anymore.

Nobody knew yet how they made their jumps to other systems and back. But, like the Biblical Jonah, we had managed to hitch rides inside of the creatures and eventually to control where they went and when. It was a triumph of sophisticated computerization hooked into the relatively-crude nervous systems of the great beasts, but it took great training to develop a light enough touch to tickle the hoppers into doing what we wanted.

AND NOW Uncle Fred was inside the control section of mine, hamhandedly trying to make it jump back to Mars instead of Earth, and I couldn't make him understand that he'd be jumping us back to . . . to what? Death? A time warp? Nothingness? I couldn't talk him out of it because I didn't know. Nobody did. But I did know we'd lost Holloway, Andrus and Springhaven along with their hoppers, and I didn't want Controller Carter to be the next to turn up missing.

When Holloway didn't return, the official explanation was that his hopper had exploded. There seemed little to support that opinion of the investigative board, except that we still didn't know what energy these things drew on to make their leaps back and forth between the stars so perhaps it could have gotten out of control. It was a safe enough guess. Holloway's target star was far enough away to keep even the largest explosion from being detected for years, if ever.

The explanation grew more elaborate when we lost Andrus a few months later. The second committee reasoned that the hoppers had to do whatever they did fast, hitting translight speed instantly for all practical purposes to avoid being squashed by the mass buildup which once seemed an insurmountable barrier to stellar travel. Andrus, the investigators proclaimed in their wisdom, must have overridden the hopper's primitive instincts and approached jump speed too slowly for some reason. Since they couldn't come up with a reason, that explanation wasn't very reassuring to the rest of us controllers.

It was the third committee that put it all together, after Springhaven failed to turn up on schedule. By then, a committeewoman had assembled some data that hadn't seemed significant before on not the lost hoppers, but some of the others. There had been hoppers that arrived ahead of schedule by several seconds, one by as much as a minute, but the woman investigator stumbled onto the significant correlation. Each time differential corresponded to differences in the hopper's departure and return points. Ideally, a hopper popped back into the system at the exact point it left just outside lunar orbit, but it was easy to miss that point by a few kilometers if you were at all sloppy in programming the return jump. Who cared? The point was still always far enough from Earth so we didn't have to worry about the hopper burning up in its atmosphere or, worse, yet, not burning up and leaving some fragment to survive all the way to ground level.

Once the investigator outlined her findings, we began to care plenty. It turned out we didn't know as much about faster-than-light travel as we thought. A time factor was involved, too. The further a hopper was off from its point of departure when it arrived back, the more time it gained.

And if Springhaven and the others had been off by a sufficient distance, the new theory went, they could have arrived back in the system decades or even centuries early—too early for there to be escort tugs waiting to nudge their hoppers toward the lunar surface where the occupants could be extricated by means similar to the one I was now trying on a smaller scale.

IT TOOK longer with my little portable laser, but finally I saw the inner wall of the hopper quiver. The organism was reacting. I imagined I could smell the searing of its cellular structure, despite my airtight suit. Did these organisms feel pain? I pushed the question away and steadied the laser. The blackened skin began to retreat, trying to escape the sustained heat. It thinned and finally parted—then the hole began to widen more rapidly, until it was wide enough for me.

Clipping the laser instrument back onto my suit belt, I pushed myself through far enough to sink my gloved fingers into the leathery folds of skin outside. Normally I'd have allowed myself a moment of awe at the vista of stars scattered across the heavens in patterns never before regarded by humans, but this was no time for sightseeing. Still, the glimpse recalled how Uncle Fred had first kindled my interest in astronomy when he helped me build my first backyard telescope. At the same time, he'd introduced me to the pre-space age conceptions of Mars by oldtime writers in those books of his—Burroughs, Bradbury, Brackett and all the rest—which he seemed to enjoy as much as I. The only time he'd expressed displeasure was when I'd located a Mars story by a writer named Wells during some idle browsing through some titles on my home video terminal. He almost seemed angry when he walked in and realized what I was screening, and insisted that I had to read such stories in book form to enjoy them properly, to hold them in my hands and digest them. He was as partial to old-fashioned books as though he'd lived in the days before video scanning made them obsolete.

Stop daydreaming, you fool! Behind me, the injury I'd inflicted was already closing, just as it would after a meteorite puncture or anything similar, before the organism's cytoplasm could leak out. It was this phenomenal rapidity of cellular growth that made the hoppers so dangerous on anything but a virtually lifeless world. They also absorbed any organic cells they came in contact with. If even one of them had ever landed on Earth intact, it was theoretically possible

that it would eventually reduce the entire planet—air, water and all organic matter—to a dead world, which was why the crew of that first ship back from Deimos chose suicide over rescue. They had realized the properties of their captive hopper just in time, after it had absorbed most of the crew and every other organic substance it touched.

I scrambled frantically to pull my legs clear, without tearing myself loose from my grip on the hopper's outer skin, imagining myself caught half in and half outside as the organism healed itself around me. That fast healing ability made the hoppers much safer as space vehicles than the metal clunkers of earlier times, but I couldn't shake the fear that eventually it would find a way to me through my suit and I would become merely part of it, my own space vehicle, rather than its controller.

After that first ship, we were more cautious. We examined the hoppers from a distance, poking and prying at them with inorganic instruments, sound waves, radiation and other means of finding out what made them tick. When the first one disappeared before our cameras, it took years for the researchers to figure out it had made a translight jump, tickled into doing so by our clumsy examinations.

How they had originated was anyone's guess. And the guesses included everything from their being leftovers from genetic experiments by some advanced race that perhaps inhabited a planet where the asteroid belt now existed to their drifting to our system from some other birthplace and taking root on Deimos. Even on that dead little chunk of rock, they managed to absorb enough radiation to maintain a flicker of life. On Earth, they would have spread from pole to pole. But in the research stations on the moon, their growth could be controlled so we could produce as many as we could use. We would never have to visit Deimos again, since the specimens we managed to bring back recreated new hoppers as fast as we wanted them. And now we were going to the stars.

MY SUIT, of course, was covered with a layer of plastic-like inorganic material that would protect me from my hopper adding me to its cellular growth. I knew that. I also knew that one crack in the suit's outer layer would be all the hopper needed to snake its way inside to me, and it was all I could do to maintain a tight grip on its hide as I made my way forward. I didn't know which would be worse, dying from depressurization of my suit or being absorbed by the hopper.

Even protected, I'd never before climbed around on the outside of a hopper this way. All I ever had to do was get in and out of the ball-shaped center. The handlers on Luna did the rest, inserting the center through a temporary gash they made along a hopper's side and hooking it with mechanical arms to the already-implanted connections with its simple nervous system. As far as I was concerned, those people on the moon had the scariest job—working with these things as they grew and fissioned, and preparing the new ones so they could be manipulated by controllers like myself.

Starhoppers weren't quite round. They were elongated, capsule-shaped, although there was little difference between one end and the other. Sill, my lessons during controller training on what we knew about the creatures were that whatever sensory organs it possessed lay up front, at the slightly fatter end, and that interference with them would cause violent internal reactions that could endanger the control center. That primitive nervous system to which it was

connected would jerk it around until it cracked, allowing the surrounding cytoplasm to seep in and gradually displace the air.

Yes, that would certainly stop Uncle Fred from manipulating the hopper. He'd put me in the only suit aboard—supposedly only one person was on this voyage—and there would be no way for him to save himself. I could re-enter the creature by burning my way through its outer flesh once more, probably one of the breaks in the control center would be big enough for me to slip through, even suited. Although having to keep wearing the suit would make it awkward, I should still be able to manage the original jump back to Earth—unless the hopper was hurt too badly to respond properly to my manipulation of its nervous system. I should have enough air in my tanks to last until a tug reached me.

"Johnny?"

The two grayish bulges in the skin to the front of the hopper were now in view. Eyes, ears, or some other sense we couldn't comprehend—nobody knew exactly what they were, but we did know the hoppers used them somehow to gauge their movements, their jumps, and that any problem with them sent hoppers into fits . . .

"Johnny, my boy—where are you? Answer me. I've finished. You must anchor yourself to the control center out there. I'm going to activate the jump sequence right away . . . Johnny, do you hear me?"

There was no time to bother with the laser. Hanging above the nearest bulge, I drew back my foot and kicked at it as hard as I could with the boot. The sensory organ must have been softer than the rest of the creature. There was a squishy feeling of resistance, but that was all. Then the leathery hide of my star-hopping beast began moving beneath me, as though I were clinging to a rock wall that had suddenly turned into a raging prehistoric beast . . .

How I got back inside and reached the control center, I never quite knew. I must have used the laser again, but I have no memory of it. I do remember banging my head against the inside of my helmet. The next thing I knew, I was clambering around the control center looking for one of those cracks the experts had predicted, and finding absolutely none. But the access chamber irised open, and there was Uncle Fred, pulling me in.

I suppose I must have blacked out again.

When I began coming out of it, I felt like I was stuck in one of those nightmares where you're trying to run and you can't get anywhere. There was this enormous drag on my entire body. Gravity, of course—I hadn't recognized it because I hadn't expected it . . .

Gravity! My eyes popped open, and I found myself staring at a dark blue sky, lying on my back. My helmet had broken open, but I seemed to be breathing without difficulty. I tried to sit up, and found my movements further encumbered by the suit I was still wearing. Water splashed around me as I raised myself to one elbow.

I found myself along the shore of what seemed to be a lake, in a valley surrounded by walls lush with colorful foliage, giving off scents that seemed to me pleasant but unfamiliar. As my eyes came down to the lake again, I saw charred fragments bobbing on the water that I recognized as the remains of my control center, looking now more like bits of a broken egg shell.

"Johnny . . ."

He was lying only a few meters from me, looking nearly as broken as the con-

tol center that had somehow carried us down. I scrambled over to him, and cradled his head on my arm. It was all I could do for him now, that was painfully obvious.

"Johnny, my boy, forgive me—I beg you—"

His voice was little more than a whisper. "Don't try to talk, Uncle Fred. It's all right. Somehow we made it back home."

"No, my boy," he said, closing his eyes for a moment and opening them again. "We are not on your planet. We're on mine."

"Uncle Fred—"

"My planet—and back in my time, it appears," he went on, gazing out at the horizon beyond the lake. "Before whatever catastrophe overtook it, leaving not even a microbe for your early space probes to discover. And then—" He grimaced in pain, then continued. "And then, you had gone on out of the system, giving not even a backward glance to your own planetary neighbors anymore. I waited—you have no idea how long I waited, my boy—to find someone who could fit in with the state of your art and bring me back. When my mind scanned yours back in that library, I knew I could develop it in you . . ."

His voice dropped even lower. "What, Uncle Fred? Develop what in me?"

"I saw in you all the yearnings I would need, if I channeled them properly. It was not the first time I had used mental abilities you could not comprehend. Who do you think influenced so many of those writers—in generations before yours—to maintain interest in my home world?"

Either he was out of his mind, as I'd believed earlier, or we were on the planet Mars—not the Mars I has studied in astronomy lectures on my home video terminal, but the Mars of those dusty books Uncle Fred had used to turn me into what I'd become. Looking again at the daylight sky that was too dark and the vegetation that seemed so unfamiliar, I knew which it had to be.

I leaned down close to him again. "Uncle Fred, what about my starhopper? How did the control center break free of it?"

"It—it seemed unable to control its flight," he gasped, "after the jump it approached my world. It struck one of our moons—most of it must still be there . . ."

"Most of it? Uncle Fred, what about the rest? *What happened to the rest of it?*"

But this time Uncle Fred's eyes stayed closed.

After a time—minutes, hours, I didn't know—I stood up and began stripping off the cumbersome suit. I wouldn't need it here. How much, I wondered, had Uncle Fred influenced those visions of Mars we'd had in our imaginations? Would I find myself on Burrough's version? Or Bradbury's? Or—and this thought gave me pause—Wells? Or perhaps a little bit of them all?

I didn't know. But I was looking forward to finding out. That much, at least, Uncle Fred *had* done for me. In making me over for his own purpose, he had instilled in me a love almost as powerful as the one he must have had for his world. It was no good hating him for it. I was what I was, whatever else I might have been otherwise. And, given that, I had an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of it.

Somewhere in that dark sky above me, I knew, on a tiny satellite that must not have been quite lifeless, a colony of starhoppers was taking root—a colony which, in time, would be discovered by future voyagers from my world and utilized to travel to the stars. Just as somewhere on this planet, a few bits and

pieces of the hopper would have rained down and would be growing and spreading inexorably in the time ahead. I knew what the eventual result of that would be. The old Viking landers of the twentieth century had told us.

I walked away from the lake, the Earth-grown muscles of my legs carrying me tirelessly in the lighter gravity toward the nearest mountain in my haste to see what lay beyond. After all, I didn't know how much time I had to enjoy whatever life now existed on this world. I intended to make the most of it.

John Carter had returned to Mars. ■

Bio-sketch

Paul Dellinger

It was during the early 1960s when I was in the Army that I ran across a paperback reprint of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *At the Earth's Core* and snapped it up. Until then I'd associated Burroughs almost exclusively with Tarzan, although as a youngster in the 1950s I had read a couple of comic book adaptations of his *John Carter on Mars* tales published by Dell. So it was with delight in the succeeding years of the 1960s that I devoured his *Mars*, *Venus*, *Pellucidar* and other books in the Burroughs reprint boom that followed.

Mars had always interested me anyway, as it did practically all s-f enthusiasts growing up in the 1950s. One of the first s-f books I read included the Mercury Theater radio script adapting H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (in fact I was born two

months before the "panic broadcast"), and another was Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. That was the pre-space age Mars, you see, still mysterious to us, possibly the home of a canal-building race, and figuring in the s-f we read, heard on radio and would see in TV and movies. The new TV adaptation of Bradbury's *Chronicles* proves much of that old fascination with Mars remains.

All of which was involved in the generating of this story, which attempts to reconcile the two faces of Mars and have some fun doing it.

TWO VISIONS

"Have you seen the giant coming,
Raising high his steely arm?
Have you seen him stamp the hills flat?
Have you seen his flaming sword?"

"Have you seen the cities topple?
Have you seen him scorch the land?"
Said madman unto madman,
In the frenzy of his dream.

"No, I've seen no giant coming.
No, I've seen no flaming sword,
But I've gazed into the future,
To the dimmest, distant shores.

I have seen no swift destruction;
Not so simple is Time's plan—"
Said madman unto madman,
In the terror of his dream.

--Darrell Schweitzer

product to the other groups, allowing for give-and-take discussion.

Brainstorming is the basis of the game. This means participants should feel free to suggest any and every idea that comes into their mind. Without censure. This stimulates creativity. After everyone in a group has had the opportunity to offer their front page story titles (and only the headlines — developing stories would be impracticable) then you should select which ideas to include. The principles for inclusion can be varied, however. They may be built into a group.

Group A might be optimists about the future. **Group B** might be volunteers who say they feel pessimistic and **Group C** may feel that tomorrow will simply be extra weird. If you live in a city that has more than one daily newspaper, one group might compose a *Tribune* front page for this date, next year, another may create a future *Sun Times*. Or other widely circulated papers can be simulated, like the *L.A. Free Press*. You can make up your own future newspaper too, such as the *Antarctic Gazette* or the *Martian Chronicle*. Have fun.

THE CHALLENGES GAME

This game was designed by Sharon Cooper and Ed Fujioka, students of Alan Hald at Mesa Community College in Arizona. It has since been modified by various participants during play among members of the Phoenix chapter of the World Future Society.

This is an example of a "mind game" in the best sense of the words. It employs elements of "method acting" — putting yourself imaginatively into another time. The game itself, however, can be thought of as a "psychological laboratory" since, you will

discover if you play, imagination can do strange things. Challenges is a memorable game.

One group, generally nine people or less, can play. But a number of groups can be involved in different versions of the game simultaneously. Each group, at any rate, represents a council of decision-makers. If you are a "council member" you become responsible for the lives of a population that, as play progresses, may almost seem real.

Equipment for the game? Everyone should have a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Otherwise some coffee or tea is all you'll need.

A group starts out knowing only three "future facts": (1.) *where they are*, (2.) *the total population of the community* and (3.) *the date*. The game works best if a list of possibilities is written down beforehand. Then the future facts can be drawn from a hat for each group. What is drawn might tell you the date is 1991, the location is somewhere under the Pacific Ocean and the population is 2,000. But the possibilities are endless. You might find yourself in New York City in the year 1993 with a population of 5 million "and shrinking fast," or perhaps in the year 2020 as one of four billion people in Latin America. Or you could be in a space ship en route to another star on a journey that will take 50 years beginning in the year 2076 with 20 people and three computers. Or maybe the year is 3076 and you represent 20 people, 30 computers and 40 cyborgs on an orbiting city revolving around Pluto with all inhabitants there for life.

Once you know this information each person in the group is asked to write down the single most important problem in the community in 10 words or less. Five minutes should be enough time for this. Then everyone

explains the problem they see to the other players.

All of these problems combined then become the master problem. After enough conversation — questions, give-and-take, etc. — to get the picture clearly in mind, everyone again has five minutes to compose a single solution to the master problem. Your final task is to agree on a master solution. See what happens.

This game can be varied without increasing its complexity. If more than one group is playing at a time the date might be the same for each so that, at the end of a session, if a spokesperson describes his or her group's process to all other participants, an over-all impression of life on Earth in 1988 can emerge. One group might be decision-makers for Alaska's 10 million people, another would represent the 100,000 living in a Soleri arcology on the Arizona desert while a third might represent India's 1 billion population. Short, descriptive names can be given to communities which have no current precedent, i.e. like Dometown or Portacity.

Your Attitudes Shape the Future You Foresee

IN AT least one sense everyone is a futurist. We all make assumptions about the future. We choose to believe that tomorrow will or won't be like today. We entertain high hopes more often than not or we face the future with foreboding. In other words, expressions of optimism or pessimism indicate our "future type." We can be more precise than this, however, in indentifying ourselves — or others — as futurists.

One important distinction was first made by regional futurist Robert Theobald. According to Theobald's scheme of things, futurists come in three categories.

Positive extrapolators project "the best" of the present into the future, and see tomorrow basically as a continuation of today. If you tend to do the same you would probably feel at home in the company of people like Herman Kahn, the president of the Hudson Institute. Even though, to be sure, if you found yourself in the same room at the same time as the man who invented concepts like fail-safe weapons systems, future scenarios and limited nuclear war you might feel overpowered.

"Negative extrapolators" expect the worst. Today's troubles, problems and difficulties are seen by such futurists as dominating the world to come, you would be a candidate for this category if you found yourself in near total agreement with *Limits to Growth*.

Synergists see both pluses and minuses in the future, both opportunities and dangers. They seek to devise positive alternative plans of action. Synergists try to take a balanced view of how things change. If this is your outlook you share at least some values with, for example, John McHale and Magda Cordell. They are the futurist couple who have probably done the most of anyone to study the future of the futures movement.

But there are still other ways to look at futuristics. Besides the optimistic-pessimistic split among futurists, for example, there is what might be called a humanist-establishment division.

"Jeremiahs" are humanistic futurists who don't see much sunlight ahead "unless we mend our ways." Like the Old Testament prophets these futurists are conditionalists. "If . . . then . . ." is their motto. Should this be your motto too, count yourself in this category. ●

COCKROACHES



SAM GOLDSTEIN was the super in a highrise apartment building on E. 22nd Street. A simple man with a few aspirations beyond his chosen profession, Sam could always be seen making his rounds, a row of wrenches clanking at his hip, through the halls of the large stone building repairing the unending chain of leaks, clogs, and assorted apartment maladies. A pleasant person, as supers go, Sam could often be heard remarking to Myrtle, his wife for thirty-seven years, that they had everything a couple could want. If you knew Sam and Myrtle well enough you might be inclined to believe that.

They had two children in college, both studying law in upstate New York; they had a son in the Peace Corps, stationed in Israel; they had two thousand dollars in the bank, not counting an additional sum set aside for Arthur when he returned to the states; they had a homey little, rent-free, apartment in the basement; and, when they came home at night after dark, they had cockroaches.

"Sam, Sam," Myrtle would scream, running hot water into the kitchen sink hoping to scald a few of the slower ones. "You have got to do something about these things. I told you once this morning, and I'm telling you once again . . . , Sam? Are you listening to me?"

But of course he wouldn't hear her. He was in the john running scalding water into the tiny porcelain sink, though it never did any good. Nothing hurt cockroaches anymore.

Myrtle's face appeared in the fogged mirror above the sink. Sam turned off the hot water.

"... for thirty-seven years, and still we have cockroaches. Why is it, Sam? Why is it that my husband can't get rid of a few cockroaches?"

But he'd tried. For thirty-seven years he'd tried, and for thirty-seven years the cockroaches tried just a little bit harder. He'd tried roach-cakes; they ate the roach-cakes. He'd tried roach-tape; they ate the tape. He tried stepping on them; they made a little cracking sound with their mouths and, when he lifted his foot looking for a dead roach, they ran away. Nothing killed roaches, but each night before going to bed he said a little prayer to God just the same.

But each morning the roaches were back in the sink.

"SAM, SAM."

The row of wrenches stopped jingling. Sam turned and looked back down the hallway. Mrs. Goodman stood in her orange bathrobe at the entrance of her apartment. Bright red lipstick, covering her thin lips, overflowed onto her front teeth and fluttered like a captured butterfly as she called . . .

"Sam, I've got the cockroaches again, big as kiwi fruit, and all over the kitchen sink."

The wrenches rattled again, and Sam walked past Mrs. Goodman and into her ninth floor apartment.

"When I was a little girl," continued Mrs. Goodman, following Sam into her small closet-size kitchen, "you never got cockroaches if you lived above the fourth floor. But today you live up nine floors, pay higher rent, and for what? The cockroaches still come to visit. How do they do it, Sam?"

Sam looked down into the jungle of breakfast, lunch, and dinner dishes.

"Sure having a banquet, aren't they?"

"And on the ninth floor," added Mrs. Goodman. "Now you tell me, how do they get to the ninth floor?"

Sam shrugged, "Maybe they take the elevator. You got any roach-spray?"

"Roach-spray? You kidding? They shower in roach-spray."

Sam turned to go. "Well, maybe I'll get something new from Mr. Youngman. Maybe if you go out today I'll bomb . . ."

"But you bombed last Thursday."

"So I bomb again on Monday."

"But then I can't sleep with that smell . . ."

Sam turned in the doorway. "So live with the roaches." His wrenches jingled and the door closed softly from the outside.

SAM BOMBED for three tenants that day; Freeman in 902, Rosen in 906, and Goodman in 904. When he returned home to Myrtle that night he smelled so bad she made him get undressed in the hall. She washed his clothes three times to get the smell out and once to get them clean, while Sam sat watching late night television in the bedroom.

More than once he heard Myrtle in the kitchen getting more soap, and more than once he heard her complaining about the smelly roach-bomb Mr. Youngman had given him that afternoon.

"What happened to that sweet smelling stuff you used to use, Sam?"

"Roaches like sweet smelling stuff," answered Sam from the bedroom. "Mr. Youngman says they adjust to things, so you have to make stuff stronger."

"So to be stronger it has to smell bad?"

"I don't know. I'm just a super. Don't ask me scientific questions."

"So I ask you a laundry question. How do you get rid of smelly uniforms when you run out of detergent?"

But Sam didn't answer. He was too busy watching the commercial on channel 9.

There was a man with an ugly tie holding a can of what could have been Raid or Black Flag (a big X covered the brand name) and saying something about roaches. It was one of those long, cheaply made, local commercials that seem to congregate on television after the eleven o'clock news. It was about a new patented roach-killer which didn't

smell bad, didn't require repeated applications, and was one hundred percent effective. Sam watched with interest to find out what this marvel remedy consisted of, but at the end of the commercial all he got was a price and an address to send money to. There was; no COD, money back if not delighted, and eight percent sales tax for New York residents.

Sam grabbed a pencil, and, as there was no paper in sight, scribbled the address on the bedsheet. His peace of mind was worth that much.

SAM HAD just finished bombing for four tenants; Goldblum in 811, Salomon in 813, Frank in 815, and Goodman in 904. He was coming through the first floor hallway smelling of roach-death, when he noticed that Mr. Marshall, the postman, was in the lobby stuffing mailboxes. By his feet was a large brown box with a familiar logo. Sam tapped on the glass.

"Is that for me?"

Mr. Marshall flipped the box up to eye level. "Says here, Sam Goldstein on East 22nd."

Sam cracked the door.

"Whew!" said Mr. Marshall, "you smell like roach-death."

"The roaches should think so," answered Sam, and he turned to the stairs that led to his apartment.

Inside the box, aside from crumpled pages from the New York Times, was a large plastic jar of what looked like over a hundred black medicine tablets.

"So you give the roach a glass of water and a sleeping pill. For that you spend four hundred ninety-nine dollars?" Myrtle was angrier than Sam had ever remembered seeing her.

"But it's money back if . . ."

"If the company you send your money to is around tomorrow."

She turned and, taking her shopping cart from the hall closet and a Citibank card from Sam's wallet, slammed the door.

Sam switched on a light and read the directions.

On closer inspection the tiny black medicine pills turned out to be little motorized cars. Well, they didn't look like cars, but that's what the pamphlet called them so it must be what they were. They ran on small wheels, and when they came near a roach — ZAP!

Well, that was clear enough. He put one on the floor. It raced across the floor and disappeared into a crack in the wall.

ZAP!

Three roaches fled the crack in the wall and scurried pell-mell across the linoleum. The little black car was close behind.

ZAP — ZAP — ZAP!!!

Sam went back to the pamphlet.

The following three pages explained how cockroaches, like all insects, could become immune to man's methods of pest control due to

something called genetics. Sam didn't know what that word meant, but he assumed it had something to do with eating roach-cakes. Anyhow, what it came down to was that a strong poison might kill a million roaches, but, because there were so many roaches, a few always survived. These were some kind of super roach, and, when they had little roaches, all the next generation would be like them — immune to the poison. This meant man had to make a stronger poison, but the same thing happened — a vicious cycle.

Oy, thought Sam, no wonder that stuff Youngman gives me smells so bad.

He looked up. The first little car was nowhere to be seen. He reached into the jar and set another one on the floor. This one spun around and disappeared behind the sofa.

ZAP!

Sam went back to reading. The rest of the pamphlet was about printed memory chips and the wonders of miniaturization which, naturally, left Sam cold. After all, he was only a super.

"SAM! SAM!"

He turned and saw Mrs. Goodman's orange robe flowing in the stagnant air of the ninth floor hall. She was running straight toward him.

Her lips felt like a wet crayon on his cheek.

"For three weeks I've stayed in my apartment, and not one cockroach. Sam Goldstein, you're a wonder."

Sam smiled his Gene Autrey smile, the one he hadn't used since he was a child dreaming of being a hero, and walked down the hall. His wrenches sounded like jingling spurs as he looked back over his shoulder and muttered, "Is nothing, Mrs. Goodman. Nothing at all."

Things went pretty much that way for the rest of that year. Then he remembered something he'd read in the pamphlet about the power cells the little cars carried. They were only good for about a year, and at the end of that time a new jar of cars had to be ordered. Not wishing to take unnecessary chances, Sam got out the pamphlet, filled out the reorder form, and dropped it in the mail with another check.

At the end of two weeks, instead of receiving his order of replacements, Sam received a letter from the company president along with his uncashed check. The letter simply stated that, although the new method of roach control had proven extremely successful in the cities it had been used in, a few unexpected drawbacks had arisen. It was, of course, nothing to worry about, but for the time being the FTC was demanding no orders be filled until a full investigation was completed.

Sam put the letter into a drawer and forgot about it. That was when things really started to happen.

the sofa in the living room. Myrtle's voice rose above the cascading faucet.

"Sam, there's a roach in the sink."

"So run water on him."

The water stopped. "I did. He ran up the sink and behind the counter. How come we have roaches when you have those smart little cars?"

"Maybe the roaches are getting smarter."

He rubbed his eyes and sat up. Two black figures darted across the living room floor. It was nothing unusual, except this time Sam could have sworn the roach was in pursuit.

The incident lay dormant in his mind until a few days later when he was sweeping the stairwell outside his apartment. Something hard scraped between his broom and dustpan. Bending down, he discovered a tiny black object lying still amid the dust and broken glass. It was one of his little cars. He picked it up.

The insides had been torn out.

No, not torn out — laid out. The plastic skin of the car had been cut open and the circuitry inside removed in nice, orderly, fashion. He looked through the dust in the pan. There were more.

Three, no, there were four . . .

Five, six.

He dumped the whole lot into his hand and raced down the hallway to his apartment. He opened the door and snapped on the light.

"Myrtle?"

A huge cockroach stared back at him from the wall above the kitchen sink. Setting down the dustpan, he walked to the sofa for a roll of newspaper.

From the wall, two antennae waved in mute defiance. Two? No, there were six . . .

Eight, twelve.

He turned with the rolled up Times in his hand. The wall was covered with cockroaches. He moved toward the door.

From the crack in the wall, halfway between himself and the door, rolled three ominous looking . . .

The tiny black cars stopped at the door and turned to face Sam. One look, and the situation became clear.

The cars were no longer working for Sam. ●

Bio-sketch

Lawrence C. Connolly

I spent the coldest winter of my life in a yellow cab. Snow blew, ice glazed the windshield till it looked like that awful glass used in old doctor's offices, and the heater

threw cold air across my already stiff Thom Mcan's. I drove the early shift that year and subsisted on Egg McMuffins. Charles Dickens had it right; *It was the*

best of times. It was the worst of times. I had a cab without heat, but I also had your magazines.

They sat on the front seat piled into a pyramid, glowing like a fire with tabloid-sized flames. When things were slow, as they often were in the early mornings of that coldest winter, I'd crack the covers of those flames, and I was warm until the rear door flew open. "Take us to Sak's, driver." I'd close the cover, flip the flag on the meter, and suffer the cold until I found an-

other empty stand.

It was during that winter that I decided I had to be a writer. I didn't know at the time how many stories I had in me, I just felt I'd taken so much warmth from science fiction that it was time to give a little back.

Thanks, Amazing, your fire's burning strong as ever. Here's my contribution to the longest blazing nova on the news-stands.

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DO YOU find me attractive?"

The young woman (thirty-ish, he guessed) leaned back in the easy-chair, but not provocatively. She wore a crisp, white jumpsuit, almost like a uniform. Once, in his university days, he would have seduced such a woman: lithe limbs, full lips, and lovely, dark-brown hair, one long strand of which lay interestingly forward over her left shoulder. She smiled, but only slightly, as she awaited a response.

"Yes, Anita, exquisitely so. If only I were fifty or sixty years younger, my dear. Or even forty!"

He spoke his words slowly and carefully and laughed his soundless laugh. His clear, blue eyes still sparkled with the light of youth, but his thin, aged body only weakly and grudgingly obeyed him now.

But he was not an unhappy man, for he had seen much in his lifetime—though of course he longed to see more, like many others of his type. The first manned expedition to Mars was still sharp in his mind; even sharper was the moment he and his band of astronauts had finally landed on Titan. He smiled at the wonderful recollection.

Anita, a space traveler from a system in Andromeda, could read the old man's mind. Of course she wasn't really called Anita, but it was a name she knew he would like; it was romantic. She loved to just sit in the leather chair, surrounded by the mountains and the ice outside the glassed-in, rose-colored

the Gift

by HEINZ D. WOHLK

veranda, listening to his thoughts. She knew he cherished most the memory of that first Titan exploration. Though she had been with him only one Earth month, she knew it always made him feel better to remember those days and to speak of them to someone who would listen with interest to what he had to say. It helped to quell his desire for new sights, at least temporarily; but soon there would be another way for him. She had decided that he should spread that wonderful mind of his through the universe, that he should become a space traveler like her.

"Tell me about the first contact, Henry. Tell me again what they said and did." He had insisted that she call him Henry, not Mr. or Col. Statler.

Of course she had seen hundreds, even thousands, of different intelligent beings in her millennia of life, but Henry did not know that; "thirty-ish," she had heard him think; she relished the moment.

Anita leaned forward to appear to hear him better. He did not know she could read minds. Nor did he disbelieve her when she'd told him she was working on a dissertation about culture barriers, and that that was why she had come here from Earth to see him.

The old man folded his hands on his shirt, put his legs up on the little stool in front of his leather chair, and began to talk about the old days. His face brightened as he spoke, looking off into the light-blue sky of Titan at Saturn's paper-thin rings.

"Not far from here," he began, "is where we first landed." He pointed to the base of a mountain a few kilometers directly south. He took a deep breath and sighed, then pursed his thin lips as he looked down, then up at the rings again.

"Up there," he said, "are five or six orbiting bases now, studying the rings. I was up there once, you know. It wasn't pleasant, I'll tell you—far too many people—too many scientists with their super-cooled computers."

The old man lifted his glass and looked out over the forbidding landscape. He brought the rare orange juice to his lips, sipped it slowly, and went on:

"The trouble with the bases in the rings, girl, is that there's too little day-dreaming going on!" She smiled in response, and he did, too; he continued: "So I'm content to stay here on Titan, and I do have my friends at the Institute down the road."

He took another slow drink, then looked squarely and sharply at her. "You know what they do in there?" he asked.

"No; what?"

"They study us humans! And I've never seen them use a single computer." He smiled at the idea, his eyes sparkling again.

After a few moments, he began to stare straight ahead, and she could feel his eyes welling up with the tears of decades ago, when he had been grounded due to advancing age and his years of exploration had come to an end.

Anita waited. He would talk more soon. She had already decided to give this transplanted Earthman the Gift, but for now she was only making sure that he had a chance to enjoy his reminiscences one more time. She knew well how he felt, for she had felt that way once a long, long time ago, just before her own Change.

The Change is by no means painful; in fact, it comes upon one rather gently, filling the mind with warmth and wonder, and is over in a few minutes. A Changed being need merely touch the brain of the other, and the power of the Gift infuses permanently, through the deliberate will of the Changed. With the Gift, a body becomes surplus.

To Andromedans the Change is sacred, given only as a Gift to those few among them who have the vision of beauty that too often is missing from those who push back frontiers and expand civilizations. To other races the Gift is wholly unknown. Only recently, moreover, have the Andromedans begun bestowing it upon aliens. No human had thus far been among them, for none had yet contacted life outside the humans' solar system. No Titanian had received it, either, nor, thought Anita, would any have it for a long, long time, for as yet they showed no interest in space travel.

But this Earthman would have it. She had happened upon the human exploratory activity at the edge of Sol's system and was drawn inward to see more. Her flight, made possible by the pure energy of the mind that could be harnessed only by the Andromedan Gift, took her in an instant to Titan, where she found her way to the old explorer Henry Statler. Taking human form, she posed as a student in search of his wisdom; this pose was not so far from the truth.

Henry not only had the sense of quest so necessary for sentient life to avoid stagnation, but he had the rare quality of appreciation, of wonder, as well. She meant to see to it that he would use those characteristics for the good of all life for many years to come—for *millennia* to come, and beyond.

"I was the first one to step out," the old man continued, wiping his eyes, face averted so that she could not see. "I looked around, space suit on, and saw just about what you see around here now, minus this road; rocky, craggy peaks, and ice—lots of light-blue ice. But there was one warm spot, over by where the Institute is now, due to some earlier volcanic activity. Now, of course, we know there are hundreds of such places.

"The sky," he went on, more animated now, looking up past the rings, "the sky was blue, just like Earth's. Oh, it's a lighter blue, of course, but it's blue nevertheless. And we had instruments—*tons* of instruments to measure everything you could imagine; every eventuality was prepared for—except one: people!"

He grinned as he turned to her, the warmth of the moment filling him with life once more. His blue eyes flashed as he went on:

"I stepped out and looked around at the landscape, and I was impressed. I wanted to take off the suit, but of course I couldn't; I'd have been frozen in an instant. As for the atmosphere, we had been wrong before—as with Jupiter's moons, for example—so we couldn't take any chances.

"Then, catching me quite by surprise, two creatures, looking for all the world like humans bundled up in Siberian winterwear, marched up to me. Naturally I was quite beside myself with shock and joy."

"I can imagine," Anita said; she knew a response was expected here.

"Yes, indeed." He leaned forward, with a shaky hand picked up his glass of imported juice from the little table at his right, and took a long, deep swallow of home. "They're not humans, of course," he added at length; "and they weren't wearing any suits!" He smiled, then withdrew into himself for a time.

Though his mind was overflowing with memories and desires, he showed no outward signs of continuing his narrative.

"These people. Did they speak to you?"

"Yes, my dear, they did. But damned if I could hear a single word." He laughed. "I mean, our scientists had forgotten to plan for such an encounter and of course not anticipated that I'd need to *hear* what was going on outside!" He mused over the incident before resuming: "So there we stood, the two Titans and I, and I couldn't hear a blessed thing they said.!"

"Then what happened?"

"Then," continued the old man, looking more weary now, "we stood there for a time like that, Max shooting pictures like crazy from the ship's doorway. Finally the two of us understood that we were to follow the Titanians; the rest stayed behind with the ship, while we went to the Institute they have over there" (he pointed to the place) "and had a long talk. Nobody could understand anything anybody else said."

"But all that was solved in less than one month, right?"

"Yes, we got it solved all right, using sign language at first. You know, simple stuff like pointing at things, and we also drew pictures."

He took another draught of the orange juice, chuckled, and continued: "I believe we got more history exchanged in those short months before the so-called experts arrived from Earth than in all the rest of the following years, Anita!"

She laughed with him. "Why, I believe you did!"

He looked up at the rings again. "Beyond there," he said, "are other worlds. Who knows what life there is out there beyond Neptune! Right here on Titan seems to be the only intelligent life in the solar system besides on Earth. Saturn

has nothing itself, we know, except of course for our own stations; neither does Jupiter, and neither does Uranus. Pluto, of course, is far too cold—we think—and Neptune is very, very doubtful.” Henry’s eyes widened again. “But beyond that . . .”

How much he wanted to travel to the stars, to see what there is to see in this universe, she felt him thinking. Anita had seen many such visionaries in her time from all over the universe, and she had helped many of them, just as she would help this Earthman now.

He preferred to live with the Titanians (primitive according to Earth standards, at least) instead of back on Earth with his own kind—all in order to be closer to the unknown, to the frontier, to be where he had enjoyed his greatest moments.

But for him there will be other, even greater moments to come. In an hour or so, when he had finished his tale, then she would tell him. She would tell him that he has another whole lifetime to live, *many* such lifetimes, in fact. And she would teach him how to travel between worlds, how to make the magical jumps between the stars. Anita felt very proud as she looked at him and thought her own thoughts along with his. Henry would again experience the strange, the exotic, the magnificent feeling of that first moment of first contact with other intelligences.

And there are so *many* in this universe. He will have so far to travel, but he will have all of eternity. Soon she shall give him the Gift, for she knows he will use it wisely—just as she herself had received the Gift eons ago from another traveler such as she is now. And soon there would be one more.

Anita delighted in the prospect of telling him in a little while, delighted in the sure knowledge that another one would spread the Gift of Life through the universe to those who are worthy to receive it.

The old explorer went on with his tale, and the lovely, millennia-young girl listened to his words. What she heard him talk about was the past, but what she saw in his eyes was the future.

Bio-sketch

Heinz D. Woehlke

With my parents, I immigrated to Connecticut from Germany in 1953; I was 8½. I grew up near New Haven and played a good deal of baseball but lost my curve somewhere in high school. Nevertheless, I graduated in 1963, eager to get to higher education.

After an academically abysmal year at Southern Connecticut State College, a mutual agreement with the school resulted in parleying the part-time supermarket job I'd held since 1962 into full-time employment. For the next three years I had plenty of time to read, at least. In the fall of 1967, continuing part-time with the store, I returned to college and graduated *Summa Cum Laude* in January 1970 from the Uni-

versity of New Haven with a B.A. in English.

Not yet ready for graduate school, I talked UNH into hiring me as Assistant Director of Public Relations, thus proving myself qualified for the job. That fall I also began teaching English at UNH part-time.

In 1972 I quit P.R. (as well as the Army Reserves, to which I'd belonged since 1965) and came to Colorado State University, where I was a T.A., where I earned the M.A. in English Literature, and where I met my wife, Anita, also a T.A., who shared my office. Anita and I married in 1973. (Who says English has no practical applications?!)

In the fall of 1974 I started the Ph.D. pro-

gram at the University of Colorado. Before long I fell in among medievalists and consequently began working Chaucer into everything I taught there as a part-time instructor, even once in Contemporary Literature. I managed to receive the doctorate in 1977 in Old and Middle English Literature and Language, and I taught at CU for another year.

My love for science fiction is not nearly as checkered as other parts of my life. I have been voraciously reading it since age twelve and now, at thirty-five, love it more

than ever. Although I've sold numerous non-fiction pieces to local and national magazines, placing "The Gift" with you is my first fiction sale, and my happiest writing achievement. Obviously I hope there will be more.

Anita and I, and our beautiful 9½-month-old twin girls Erika and Julia, now live in Kirksville, Missouri, where I teach literature at Northeast Missouri State University, including science fiction. We are all very happy here.

PLANET SEVEN

Continued from Back Cover

appreciably different in content.

"Hello," said the originator of the broadcast. "Peace we come in." The tonal quality of the voice was as unusual as its phrasing. No picture accompanied the words.

"Welcome," Rohan said, suddenly unsure of the correct procedure.

"May inside we come?"

"I do not understand your question."

"May we with you share this star system?" the voice asked.

"Yes. That is—" Rohan was interrupted before he could add his qualifier.

"To you thanks. Two requests are had by us."

"Tell them to me."

"A corridor is needed, outward pointing from our craft."

"I'm sure that will be all right. I'll just contact—"

"It is completed," the voice interrupted again. "Also, we desire to use the seventh planet, but we need it half as distant from your sun."

"We have no current need for Uranus. I'll check—"

"It is completed. To you our thanks."

"But I hadn't really—" Rohan paused in mid-sentence, then swiveled to stare at a screen. His skin paled during the silence.

Two hours later, he switched on the *Marathon's* wide-beam transmitter and began to speak.

"To whom it may concern. This is Captain Kranar Rohan aboard the *Marathon*. A vastly superior alien emissary has arrived in our system. I'm afraid I have some good news and some otherwise. The good news is that they only wanted a corridor into deep space, and to move the seventh planet closer to the sun." His voice cracked as he resumed. "The bad news is that they count from the edge." ●

Bio-sketch

John E. Stith

John is a part-time writer, living in Colorado and earning his primary income by

supervising a group of computer systems analysts and programmers.



PLANET 7

by John E. Stith

KRANAR ROHAN'S ship was the closest one to the disruption area, but no one on board knew about it until the receipt of the message from Earth.

The message transit time cost them two hours. Once under way, they reviewed the details that followed the initial text.

Radio astronomers had been the first to notice the unusual periodic fluxuations of, until then, routine receptions in the two-centimeter band. At first, all they knew about the disruption zone was its angular location, near Betelgeuse, approximately five degrees out of the ecliptic. Within twenty-two hours they had obtained an approximate triangulation, indicating that the disturbance was local to the solar system, roughly midway between the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn.

Two hours after the discovery, Kranar's ship, the *Marathon*, received the message.

By the time the *Marathon* was a million kilometers away, the periodic contractions in the fabric of space had increased in frequency to one Hertz.

Roban was on the bridge when the first officer notified him that an apparently solid object was winking in and out of existence, in sync with the still increasing frequency of the disturbance itself.

"Move in closer," Rohan said. After a pause, he added a qualifier: "But don't get any nearer than ten kiloklicks."

By the time they reached the requested range, the disruption had died and a vast sphere occupied a volume of more than a thousand cubic kilometers. In less than an hour, they were convinced that the sphere's inhabitants or mechanisms were trying to communicate. No one knew what methods might have been tried first, but they intercepted light in several bands and radio frequency emissions in varied wavelengths and modulation types.

"Let's get closer still," Rohan finally ordered. "Stay at least a thousand clicks out."

On the first officer's suggestion, Rohan ordered the start of a continuous transmission of recorded newscasts. Another hour passed, and then the ship started receiving a signal similar in format to their newscast transmission, but

Continued on Inside Back Cover